



2012
Argus

Untamed



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Argus

2012

|Northwestern State University|

Argus Editorial Staff

Marcus Lee.....Editor-in-Chief

Khirsten Doolan.....Assistant Editor

Caitlin Pearce.....Design Editor

Samantha Trussell.....Proofreader

Anne Baham.....Editorial Staff

Tyesha Franklin.....Editorial Staff

Jacob Labutka.....Editorial Staff

Jarred Roberts.....Editorial Staff

Dr. Julie Kane.....Faculty Advisor

Acknowledgments

First off we would like to thank all of the students who submitted to Argus, even those whose work did not make it into the issue. Without these students' contributions, Argus would not be here, so thank you.

We want to thank all of those who encouraged others to submit their work to Argus, and all of the volunteers who helped us this year.

We'd like to thank all of the judges who took the time to look at the submissions and respond enthusiastically about the contest. All of the judges were very supporting of Argus and of the students who submitted to Argus, and we thank them for that.

We'd also like to thank the behind the scenes people. Mr. Gary Hardamon, for his support and photographing the artwork; Dr. Julie Kane, for being an excellent advisor; Graphic Industries, for publishing this issue of Argus; and the Department of Fine and Graphic Arts as well as the Department of Language and Communication, for always being supportive and helpful.

Thank you to all readers who have picked up this issue.

Letters from the Editors

Marcus Lee Editor-in Chief

I was excited when I was chosen to be this year's Editor-in-Chief for Argus. I want to go into publishing, specifically book editing; so I knew that this would be a great experience for me, and will look good on a resume. I've taken many creative and professional writing courses, but I have not really had any editing courses. I kind of stepped into this position blindly, but I started to get a feel for things as time went by. Working on Argus has been like taking a publishing course that has provided me with insight that I know I can use in my future.

I was a bit skeptical in my choice of being a professional writing major during my first year at Northwestern because I felt like I was alone in my decision to want to pursue a career in writing, which made me think that my career choice was not popular for good reason. When I first came across Argus, I believe an upperclassman gave me a copy, I was amazed at the work and talent of other students presented in the magazine. I didn't know the fields of study that those students were in, but seeing all of those poems and stories made me want to write more, which provided me with confidence in my education decisions.

It's amazing how Northwestern has provided students with a way of presenting their creative work to other fellow students and even the faculty through a published literary magazine, that has won awards for its design, concept, and talent. I was more interested with the being published part of Argus, but as I determined that I wanted to do more than just write, but edit as well, I realized that working on the Argus staff would be a good experience that was fun as well. I felt privileged just to work on the editorial staff last year. I always wanted to do a bit more, and the next year I did. I became the Editor-in-Chief. It's a lot of hard work, but it is manageable. At the end of the day, the end of a semester, that hard work has become a collection of pages that gets to be published and shared with everyone. I like working on Argus, especially around this time, when everything is coming together. What started out as tons of submissions has become a literary magazine that makes me swell with pride.

Khirsten Doolan

Assistant Editor

There is nothing better than hearing the songs of the soul to connect you with a group of people through artistic expressions. My first and last year working with Argus has made me feel more connected to the living, thriving entity that is NSU. When Marcus told me I made Assistant Editor, I was thrilled, nervous, and unsure as to what to expect. This experience has come as a pleasant surprise. I did not expect to be changed not only in my position as Assistant Editor but as a writer as well.

Life is moving, constant in its changes, surprising in many ways, and ultimately beautiful. The lives I have seen expressed through submissions and the dedication from the staff on this magazine have shown this concept well. I know through the submissions and through the staff's hard work, we have created a life—a solid, tangible being filled with your words and images that expresses what life is.

Overall, I am extremely thankful for this opportunity. I am thankful to the staff, supporters, and those who have submitted. Without that, we wouldn't be able to present this to you and for you. So without further ceremony, I am better for having known you all.

Letters from the Editors, cont.

Caitlin Pearce
Design Editor

This year's Argus was a very fun experience for me. I love the theme that we chose for the design (Untamed), because I was able to create a unique and concrete motif to go along with the book. In past years, I felt that the themes were so ambiguous and hard to design for, but not this year. Untamed, in and of itself, can be used in many different aspects. For me, it was a wild sense of self. Being uninhibited by life, and giving into very natural and animalistic urges and feelings. I feel that I have captured that essence in this publication and hope that others can feel it as well.

I want to thank the Editor-In Chief, Marcus, for working so well with me. Marcus, you made this year such a breeze, and I appreciate your willingness to work with me on issues and resolve any that may have arose. You were always cool, calm, and collected and so eager to take this journey with me. You made this experience so much more enjoyable for me and it was a pleasure to work with you on this project. Thank you!

Judges Panel

Poetry

Dr. Darrell Bourque

Dr. Darrell Bourque received his B.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Florida State. He was named the Artist of the Year by the Acadiana Arts Council in 2001. He has six published books of poetry and was the Poet Laureate of Louisiana from 2008-2009 and 2009-2011.

Fiction

Cedelas Hall

Cedelas Hall received her B.A. in Speech/Language Pathology at Louisiana State University and her M.A. at George Washington University. She has published short stories in *Bellowing Ark*, *Calyx*, *Big Muddy*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *The Jabberwock Review*, and *Something in the Water: 20 Louisiana Stories*.

Judges Panel, cont.

Nonfiction

Dr. Clayton Delery

Dr. Clayton Delery received his B.A. and M.A. in English from the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, and his Ph.D. from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He teaches English at the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts (LSMSA). Dr. Clayton Delery enjoys travelling, gardening, riding his bike, walking with his dogs, and reading.

Art & Photography

Chris King

Chris King received his M.F.A. from the California Institute of the Arts. He is the head of the Visual Arts Program at LSMSA. Chris King enjoys hunting, fishing, riding motorcycles, and eating barbecue.

Larrie King

Larrie King received his B.F.A. and M.A. in Graphic Communications at NSULA. He is the Assistant Professor of Design. He was the Design Editor for Argus for three years in the past and has been a judge for artwork before as well. Larry King enjoys painting, sewing, the opera, dance, playing the guitar, illustration, and photography.

Michael Yankowski

Michael Yankowski received his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Wisconsin and his M.F.A. from Louisiana Tech. He is the NSULA Professor of Photography, and has been an Argus judge in the past. Michael Yankowski likes working with wood, cast metal, and ceramics. He has explored carousel carving, totem pole carving, and European style carving as well.

Argus Contest Winners

Poetry

1st Place- "A Little Girl Named Nola"

by Amanda Sabala

2nd Place- "Rest Stop"

by Kristen Hadley

3rd Place- "Last Moments"

by Johnathan Staton

Fiction

1st Place- "Icarus"

by Kristen Hadley

2nd Place- "Paranoid"

by Charles Crain

3rd Place- "America: The Largest

Exporter of Zombies"

by Khirsten Doolan

Nonfiction

1st Place- "10:37 PM"

by Kristen Hadley

2nd Place- "A Cross on a Hill"

by Kaysee Carrere

3rd Place- "Riverwalk, New Orleans 4:37"

by Jarred Roberts

Art

1st Place- "Victorian Gothic"

by Annabel Jones

2nd Place- "Cat and Mouse 2"

by Ethan McManus

3rd Place- "How to Eat Expensive Ice Cream"

by Ethan McManus

Photography

1st Place- "Midnight Moth"

by Ethan McManus

2nd Place- "Day at the Beach"

by Victoria Burgess

3rd Place- "Church Street Bridge"

by Annabel Jones

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Day 0

Michael Blackburn

I came to see me
when I lived by the sea
silent absence coalescing
into a wreath of rings

Oil drenched you
were and Venetian foam
snaking salients
into the green

Where later
now the random rings
will crawl heavy
through the air

Then lumbering

Clothed by complex
webs of seem
and cracked
by ancient words to wear

I came to the shore
where it began
where men like ruined patterned kelp
melt and seep into the sand

Splendor

Lacey Hanemann

Colorful scene with black and white keys
the piano cries out jazz lullabies.
It screams a simple melody that increases the complexity of my mind.
With muffled laughs piercing the thick air,
they sing to the beat with unintentional ease,
the collaboration of a collaboration of a symphony of life.

What is this frustrating masterpiece named "Life,"
pulsing rhythmically through the soles of withered shoes with the changing
of keys,
engulfing all who dance in its shadow with grace, with elegance and ease?
It whispers, words intoxicating, endless wino lullabies
that slip tiptoed through cracks in doors to pierce the silent air.
It breaks my focus, bass shakes my core, but I like the wine so I don't mind.

There's a pulling, a tugging, a drug-like addiction in my mind
that shreds already tattered reason in search of a stimulating life.
Bones are becoming plagued by age, mouth dry from rusted air.
Bodies ever glowing know that moving is the key,
but as the moon sings the sun to sleep with misunderstood lullabies,
these bodies lie limp, drifting into the realm of subconsciousness with ease.

A wanderer's stream of consciousness morphs into a sea with ease
drowning harbors of monotony and simplicities of the mind.
In a constant waltz with haunted dreams and adolescent lullabies
I run blindly towards the auras tagged "free spirit of life."
Consumed by the feeling of rough fingers on smooth keys
I search for the smell of old souls in the air.

They move silent and swift, lethargic and deafening, taste the breeze, grab
the air.
Delighted and dejected they howl as laughter devours bodies and misery is
eased.
Lucidly they see, dyed on the insides of eyelids, that disaster is the key.
Order is not essential when assembling corners of the mind
but instead a blend of dancing and love and booze and life.

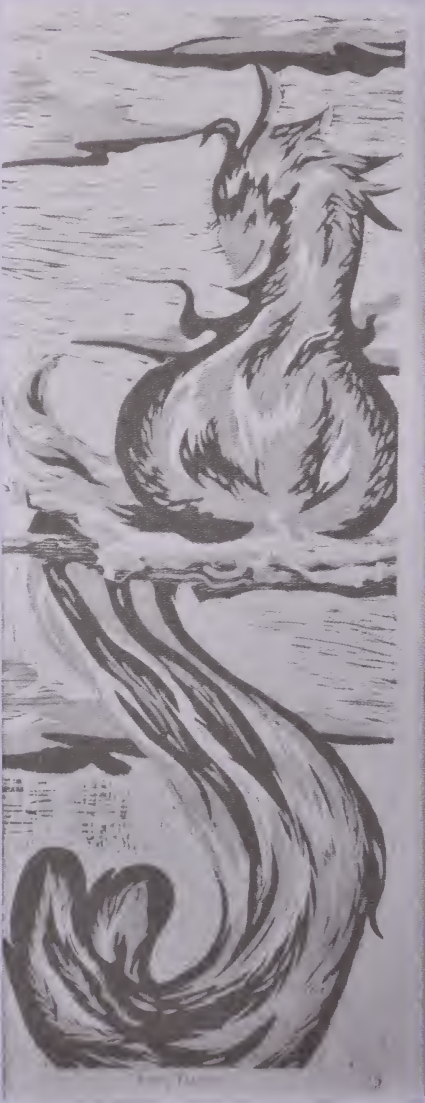
As nighttime is stolen by hopeful strangers, they find rest in the morning's lullaby.

Ecstasy as calm and quiet as a lullaby.

Vision blurred by the curtain of smoke in the air.

This moment, an everlasting portrayal of the brilliance of life crafts souls perpetually high from existence, finding bliss but no ease.

For those who know the infinite ability of a chaotic mind imprisoning, gentle and insatiate, the mayhem of being is key.



Resting Phoenix
Courtney Hawkins

CrEAtion

Amanda Sabala

Bright winds collapse and solicit taste.
Chalky, dry bites are all people can hear,
but only sweet and blackened branches touch.
The carrions rile up the smell
of thick divinity. Frictions elicit what you see
and tell nothing of what I know.

Swilled clouds drop to the darkened Earth and know
that a swift fall can taste
all your hearts and eyes. Now Fall can see
with a bird's pupil; it will overhear
lessons of a pigeon and vulture. Smell
salty apprehension in the ocean when fish touch

high rocks, grabbing at stars, a brushing touch
out of dry waters. Why reach? For a purpose? To know?
Ozone strikes fins down and beasts smell
your want. I bring you soft hands and a sweet touch
if only to serve as a distraction for your hearing.
Eyes may never see what they see.

Lives and cardinals dive through this sea,
your sea. The whole lights wash down for your touch
but you give none. Never will the crawl or hear
or lift or fall produce. Somewhere, after all this, no one knows
how to do anything, nothing, everything. I can taste
all the follies made. Halls are empty and smell

dead, gone. There is skin to smell,
but nothing is left to the nose. Released echoes are unable to see.
We walk hand-in-hand through salt wall, covered halls and taste-
less scorn. You cannot leave this place and there is no new touch.
You cannot get out, get out, out, out. Who could know
where the walls end? Cracked sobs rattle where I hear.

I cannot exchange those sobs for you. No, not here,
not now, you may never cry. The winds can only shriek and they smell
the fresh corpses, filling earthen fires. The lights—no,
not just lights, but nothing is gone. Godling's lips see.
Yes, nothing can build. I am unforgivable and you touch
my heart and this world's fraud, but only blood free of veins taste.

What is left to see when there isn't anything to touch or taste?
I am left to feast and taste freedom and touch suns thoughtlessly.

Rest Stop

Kristen Hadley

2nd Place

At the rest stop, you said the word "divorce"
at a table off the road.

You said the marriage had run its course.

I cried so long my voice went hoarse,
and when my tears slowed,
at the table, you said the word "divorce."

You apologized for being the source
of the words, a secret code.
You said the marriage had run its course.

There was no external force,
no debts that you owed.
At the table, you said the word "divorce."

I said I would not endorse
your move to a different area code.
You said the marriage had run its course.

I often wonder if you feel remorse
or regret that it plateaued.
At the rest stop, you said the word "divorce."
You said the marriage had run its course.

Love Again

Tyiesha Elliot

While you kept me close all through the night
Eliminating all my tears
Realizing that this was worth the fight
Content with no more fears

Eliminating all my tears
Finally being able to breathe
Content with no more fears
I know I still believe

Finally being able to breathe
Realizing that this all was worth the fight
I know I still believe
While you kept me close through the night

planted

Clemonce Heard

I've fallen madly in love with a tree
More than a soul mate she's my soil mate
And, I really dig her
No, no, no she's no hoe
Shut up, I'm talking
About taking the sh out of shovel
And putting the L in front not to say loser
But spell love
My hugs barely make it around
Half of her but that's okay
My baby's not fat she just got
A lot of oak in her trunk so to speak
When we talk we have deep conversations never hollow
I'm talking about getting to the root of things similar to the right
Directions that keep me going in circles
But that's cool
I'm OK not getting anywhere cause she's not going
Anywhere anyway, so, I enjoy walking around her
Passing my hands over her bark like a muffled dog
Climbing up her arms like a king's chair just
To sit on her shoulders similar to a dangling pull over
She completes me
When I'm in hell she exhales to keep me breathing heaven in
She's my medicine
She keeps me, well....alive
Under the ever quickly closing in blue skies that cover us
Where we had a sun together after her water broke
We named him photosynthesis cause he keeps us growing together
You see our seeds come from the love we make
Our kisses are like mouth to mouth resuscitation, breathe my heir
Can't you see she's my flower that never pedals away
In love we're planted
You see me and this tree, made a family
With crazy squirrel siblings that go nuts
Birds that make their nests next to us
And insects that don't bug us too much
It's here, where we have peace

Tranquility, her, the breeze, and me
What else could a man ask for?
You see she's God's gift to me
So I'd never think to cut her down
Domestic violence is frowned down upon as is darkness
And too many shadows have been casted in plays that have become tragedies
And that's not how I think a relationship should be
At least not with me and my hide and go seek home base
So I pray my baby never gets tagged, it can't be it for you
Over 3 billion trees get cut down each year but they better stay clear of you
They kill so many, they can't know
That their chainsaws cause chain reactions
Known as double homicides
Please, stop, can't you see we need these trees to breathe
And every time one is chopped down you run the risk of
Killing you or you or you or me
They need our CO₂ and without them we'd choke to death
It's true
I know it's extreme but even if I couldn't write my poetry
In notebooks it wouldn't matter as long as my love is still alive
Because if she perished due to some loose leaf paper, hand to limb, I'd die
at the exact same time
So tell them to make the timber machines stop
I can't let them take my baby she's what I call a real woman
And today that's seems to be a dying breed just like real men
But she's different, she never leaves me when I fall
She still stands by me, I'm talking still
Like not going anywhere and that's okay, I'm not going anywhere anyway
I'm planted by her love
Together we are one
If she goes I go
Forget a funeral I'm already buried alive
See with my 10 toes and her roots were already more than 6 feet deep
I would kill for her
You see she's my bride to be
And I can't let you harm her
I've worked too hard constructing
My engagement ring out of heavy duty plastic wrap
Lined with Christmas lights and ornaments to make the pear trees jealous
And I've spent too much time carving this heart shaped tattoo into her
To show that our love will never fade and keep the lumberjacks away

So stop
Before you cut another tree I want these words
To revolve around your head like planets
Or aggravating gnats whichever one you prefer
I know you may be stumped about why I care about trees so much
And that's totally fine
As long as from now on every time you see a tree
For the rest of your years on this earth
It brings you back to this poem
Back to thinking about you or you or you or me

Things We Don't Tell Our Siblings

Sarah Hale

We don't tell our little brothers that to us they are the world.
We don't ever tell them that we won't give them up to some random pretty girl.

We don't tell little brothers that we pick fights because we care.
We don't tell little brothers that we miss them when they aren't there.

We don't tell little brothers that they can beat us in a fight.
We never tell them that we hacked their Facebooks out of spite.

And just the same they don't tell us that we're smart or sweet or kind.
They never let us know that we sometimes cross their minds.

They never tell us that they threaten every other boy in our lives.
They never tell us that they want us to be our best and never have to strive.

They won't ever say they worry, won't ever say they care.
but when the time comes and we need them, we know that they'll be there.

There are things we don't tell our siblings, and wouldn't if we could,
because the words we never say are somehow always understood.

Last Moments

Johnathan Staton

3rd Place

Close my eyes when I die
I don't want to look at the sky
I don't want a lie on my lips
I just want to feel her last kiss.

I don't want to look at the sky
Because I never prayed to him before
I just want to feel her last kiss
Maybe then I'll have peace.

Because I never prayed to him before
How was I supposed to know it would all end like this?
Maybe then I'll have peace
Or maybe now I'll understand what I never could.

How was I supposed to know it would all end like this?
The signs were on the wall
Maybe then I'll have peace
Damn I just want to forget it all

The signs were on the wall
I don't want a lie on my lips
Damn I just want to forget it all
Close my eyes when I die.

Static

Michael Blackburn

Drag him on down
to the sea bed
Float the cork above his head
The moon will come out
to see him
Where he keeps the silver fishes well fed

The Buddha lies with his mother
scraping all the dew
from her eyes
The world dwindles down to a cold plane
while his head
shimmers out of the sky

Return return to the blue fields
leaving all the ghosts
far behind
To catch on the grasses like salt hooks
while the city rises up
in your sight

She waits for you there
with the freed slaves
Caught in an amber of light
But you chose from the start
to deceive her
for the sake of your dead spired night

So lash him face down
to the sea bed
Drive the line straight through his head
The Devas will come out
to see him
Where his last red breaths are shed

Small

Deana May

Tw'as autumn in my heart and winter in my bones;
With reds upon the leaves and slight orange undertones
The coldness came intruding leaving sparkles in the air
Formed with great precision we cannot see, but know is there.
I dreamt of foreign places, I dreamt of melodies
I dreamt of crystal towers built far below the seas
I awoke to fires, burning lively in the sky,
Alert to Elyon's sweet acoustics, thinking, "My...
How small am I."

What's So Wrong With Being In Love?

Randa Lopez

I never believed I was beautiful
Not until you whispered it to me
Late into the night, in the dark
In a place with no light

Not until you whispered it to me
I love you and lips met
In a place with no light
We discovered the world

I love you and lips met
And cold hearts thudded to life
We discovered the world
And made unbreakable pacts

And cold hearts thudded to life
Bringing hotter thoughts and actions
And made unbreakable pacts
What is so wrong with being in love?

Bringing hotter thoughts and actions
Frustration, Fights, Tears, and I'm sorry
What is so wrong with being in love
And giving everything to make sure it succeeds?

Frustration, Fights, Tears and I'm sorry
Followed by kisses, arms, faces to chests
And giving everything to make sure it succeeds
Because I never believed, until I met you

What Words Really Mean

Khirsten Doolan

Hark, hark! See the fire burning brightly?
It smells of smoke and of long past ages.
Is this something I will now see nightly
Through the bars of these wrought iron cages?
See the orange light of day as it begins?
I wish to taste the soft glow of the sun,
But I only see smudges through this lens
Because of what has happened and been done.
This cage I'm in isn't iron; it's dirt.
This lens isn't real because I see naught.
They lied when they said that words couldn't hurt.
They hurt just as much as anything ought.
Whisper my obituary to me
Then you can tell me what words really mean.

Regrets

Patrick Key

We all believe that we have no regrets.
We all must have led such clean and pristine
lives. All of the years of unvoiced secrets.

Lies. Why must we lie? Honesty is best,
or so I was sold. Tis a simple thing
to buy. Do I still harbor my regrets?

Getting lost in life. An easy task, yet...
the charades, the tirades... I wish to cling
to life. My steadfast years of drowned secrets

hold me back. It's best to keep some things kept.
"Let them breathe! Let your powers brightly gleam!"
I could finally dispel the regrets.

I could finally free the silhouette
pinned down with Logic, silently screaming,
rendered useless by my cache of secrets.

But those hopes must reach their dismal sunset.
It may be best for life to be brimming
with the lie "I still possess no regrets."
I can create one more unvoiced secret.

A Soul Alone

Zachary McClendon

Alone but never lonely;
Drunk on the essence of me;
Nestled in the body's room,
Shielding my soul from people's doom;
How I loved that place so sweetly.

It was the only way to be,
To save the mind from anarchy,
My life from an early tomb:
Alone but never lonely.

But her whetted eyes cut deeply,
And her voice as warm as whiskey,
Beamed light on passion's bloom;
Tore my soul from the desolate womb;
And now it's alive, awake, and free—
But alone... and finally lonely.

To My Alma Mater

Eddie Gibson

There is only good-bye now, yes bitter but sweet. Less rest in me, less to say, so good-bye Alma mater, my Alma mater—lady embedded with dreams you are.

Since the first day came, I knew I would miss this place; an inevitable fixed sorrow that has wrapped me beautifully for this formidable release.



Dancers Doing C-Jump
Derrick Notice

Ode To Finals

Patience Mattes

If this was a relationship,
you'd be the abuser.
My fingers are cut
from all of this paper.

My brain is mushy
from all of this work.
And my soul is broken
from the stress, you jerk.

I study and study,
but it's never enough.
All of your tests
keep piling up.

You don't let me eat
the foods that I want.
Instead, it's greasy,
McDonald's junk.

You steal from friends
the time that we crave.
I hardly have time to
sleep and bathe.

Only a few more exams
and then I'll be through.
I just can't wait
to be done with you!

New York New York

Samantha Trussell

Beautiful is the only way to describe it,
so sinful it's forbidden but you can't seem to escape its grasp.
Gorged with energy, conceit, and self-fulfillment
jammed to the point it makes you gasp.

But a moment you'll never forget is the look upon her face,
one so famous, so tall, so proud.
Her origin foreign but oh what she means to this place,
a symbol not forgotten, a message spoken loud.

Resembling a melting pot,
Differences here aren't uncommon.
Foreign tongues and faces come to this very spot,
to live, to love, and share a legion.

Like the forbidden fruit its temptation is unresisting.
It leaves an imprint far and wide that is nothing if not unrelenting.

Dance Of Death

Marcus Lee

The piano
playing in the background
tries to keep up with the violin
that plays so fast
the strings begin to smoke and burn
as the dancer,
breaking bones
and locking muscles,
struggles to keep up
even though the surrounding darkness
and erratic beating of her heart
tell the dancer to stop,
but the music is like the puppeteer,
and the dancer,
the marionette
that cannot end her deadly dance.

The Light At The Lip Of A Chasm

Jordan Johnson

Spinning and swirling,
Bubbles floating all around,
I slice through these torrential waters,
Searching for the ceaseless blessing of up.
Fire fills my aching lungs,
The darkening of my world begins,
Suddenly a hand appears,
This is a hand I know.
It wears a glistening ring,
A ring I put there long ago,
But hope this hand holds not,
For under the water it holds my head.
In the distance, resounds
The din of a mighty struggle,
The tortuous hand goes limp,
From my neck it withdraws.
As another slender hand replaces,
It takes hold of my wrist,
The hand struggles and heaves,
In its fight to save me.
Swiftly this new hand is joined,
By the frantic hands of many,
Many more than I had expected,
Are struggling to pull me up.
These hands are comforting,
They hold me with urgency,
I know who they are,
They are the friends who truly do care.
They each knew all of this time,
How tenuous my failing hold was,
On the lip of this mighty chasm,
And they saved my heart from misery.
Honestly they cared,
Blatant to me is their love,
So many had I not expected,
So few did I recognize among them.

Dozens of concerned faces before me,
Dangerous depths of misery behind,
I turn to face a new and bright day,
With my dearest friends at my side.



Stressed
Sherif Omotunwashe

Slipping Away

Faye Herald

Do you know what it's like to have something you love slip away?
That relationship that's been there since your very first day.
When you look into eyes that once had so much life.
Now they just look dark and there's hardly any light.

The embrace, though weak, is as sweet as it used to be.
And her word reminds me how much she loves me.
Long walks aren't something we take anymore.
That's just one of the ways things aren't like before.

Now she feels a sense of fear and confusion, not strength.
And there are days I wonder where my mother went.
I see her before me and from day to day it's not the same.
But I take it in stride and I try not to complain.

And when I'm alone the way that I am now
I pray for strength to get through it; to make it through it somehow.
And my Lord hears me and He holds out His hand.
And my comfort comes in knowing it's all in His plan.

So now I have the strength to go on, to face another day.
And guess what that sense of despair has finally gone away.
I look forward to tomorrow when I awake to the sound of her voice.
Spending these days, this time with her that's my choice.

Day 3915

Michael Blackburn

And from the ashes come
Solid, still
Stolid, kneel:
A figment tree
Turned double to the hill
And facing shards of wind
Will
To freeze the universe where it lay
The rain of photons caught in play
And hardened may
I skirt between the shafts of light
And see nothing but potential night.

The Hunt

Zachary McClendon

parading
around
banked
fire

the
coyotes
howl

moondrunk
beerdrunk
blooddunk

rejoicing
over
the fresh
kill

as the boy
the killer
the made
man

recedes
into
the cold
and
lonely
dark

weeping

To Stand Alone

Amanda Sabala

Where do you fall, Othello?
At the Gulf War?
Perhaps at the Holocaust
on your knees with Mein Führer?
What of Cassio then?

Hear my lesson, trippingly
on my tongue:
Learn.

Go out and learn
why a Cassio is a Cassio
and why you listened
to worsted war words Iago squawked.
For if you don't, new Othello,
more than just Desdemona
will fall to frightened fists.

Poor reasons are not
for war-tides. Trip no more
in Bosnia or over Russian Unions.
My advice, true Othello, to prevent—
no. Demand only what you can hold.
I speak no more.

Rat Race

Patrick Key

Sweat. I do it all day.
Toiling away. Life should be
pretty sweet right now.
But I forget that sweat
is quite salty. It never
ceases to salt my day.
And for what?
What do I have to show
for all of my sweat?
Nothing much. At least
nothing my sweaty hands can
grab on to for long.
At this point, I would
settle for a pillar of salt.
There is no glorious path
out of Sodom anyhow.
At least...
right now there isn't.
This rat race I am in
is never far from over.
And for some reason,
I do not know why
I am still tripping
over the dead mice
that litter these
travel-worn roads.
At least they finished.

How To Start Your Own Religion

Randa Lopez

Start by naming it
something cool that all the kids wanna join,
RANDATARIANISM for instance,
Now rules
for the followers to live by
Pretty much
anything
I don't want to do is against
this religion
Jumping—against this religion
Public Nakedness—against this religion
Waking up before Nine—very against this religion
MATH—It's one of the seven deadly sins
The holidays that we observe are:
most Mondays, or any day that ends in a nine
Finally we need some ideals,
some beliefs to get us through the day;
Unlike the Crusades, this religion won't start wars
This religion is about love, not fear
About acceptance of who YOU are
This religion solves its problems with
hugs and ice cream at midnight
The only place you go when you die
is to a place where you can dream
whatever you WANT and you don't want to wake up
because everyone you loved will be there
This religion
won't keep you up at night with fears of the afterlife,
No, this religion is relaxing like a hot bath
The biggest enemy of Randatarianism
is ugly things,
but beauty is in the eye of the beholder
So the only enemy of this religion is ourselves
If we can overcome that,
then we have won.

Superhuman

Olivia Moon

I may not be able to save the world,
but I count your smiles every day—
(because they make the world better).

I may not be able to fly,
but I bring you flowers just because—
(because they make you smile).

I may not fight dragons,
but I hold you while you sleep—
(so I can keep you safe).

I may not wear shiny armor,
but I give you my jacket any time you ask—
(God forbid I let you get sick).

I may not read minds,
but I hold you when you cry—
(because I know you need me to).

I may not be superhuman,
but I take on the world every day for you—
(because you make me feel like I can).

Pop Lock And Don't Stop

Jacob Labutka

When I move it to the right
Everyone give me a clap
If you get a little tight
Just do a bend and snap

Above are flashing lights
Below there is the tap
Of dancers whose passion ignites
When the music starts: shimmy-strut, no straps

Now drop it with a pop and lock
And stop like you're about to get caught
Without needing to be on top

Once my dream starts ticking on the clock
And I can show what I got
You will know I'll never stop

10 Souls

Michael Blackburn

I can't rest
beneath your tree.
There's nothing there
for me to see.

I stood astride
the broken door.
Angels don't pass
there anymore.

I numbered seven
times thirty-three.
Counting higher
points to the East:

Where empty trees
are fecund still
and ghosts haunt ruins
burned by will.

But even so
I'll bite your hook
and swallow it
for just one look:

At your mages
trawling deep
as you sleep
beneath your sea.

Top Floor Of The Superdome

Johnathan Staton

Sitting on cool concrete,
Closing my eyes and
Cradling the shotgun in my arms
I listen to the dull roar of desperation
Echo among the walls around me,
Damn,
Been up for thirty-six hours
Now it's time to rest
All I have to do is
Tune out the anger and desperation
Of a people ruined and destroyed.

I Was Surprised

Jessica Craft

I was surprised to see you standing there
Perfection through and through
Sweet smile and soft hands
To wipe away my tears

I was surprised to see you standing there
You took my breath away
All dressed in black you looked
Ready to go and dance

I was surprised to see you standing there
On such a warm summer night
It's been three weeks from then
But it still gives me fright

I was surprised to see you standing there
For just a month before
On a warm summer morning
We laid you down to stand no more

A Little Girl Named Nola

Amanda Sabala 1st Place

I grew up
not in Uptown,
not in Ninth Ward,
and not in Downtown
on Frenchman,
but on a sweet mouth.

When I was born,
my cries were unruly jazz.
The words I learned
were smooth and slow.
Ragtime was my angry rhythm.
Blues was my sad and lovesick sounds.

My skin tastes of King Cake,
and I wait for my Baby to be found.
Braid my beignet hair and rub my powder hands
down your jeans.

My church square eyes love
musicians and painters; my crescent smile
bridges Mighty Rivers
that keep on rollin'.

I have my black and gold religion
and God has our faith. The holy baby boys
will be marching
up and down my alleyways.

I fend off a hurricane of suitors
with my levee arms.
They try to drown my streets in love songs,
flushing out my low bars.
No zoot suit-man gonna to take me down;
no man gonna quiet me up.

GRACE-FULL LOVE

Joe Waller

Redeemed—

Overwhelming the thought, that the

Master would love,

And not simply speak it,

Not merely masquerade it, but would

Show it, proving it in such a way that whether you are

5 or 50, you can still come to know this Truth

: One has saved, though we failed and fled His fellowship, He still came for
8's, 24's, 61's, 95's, and any age who answer Him with faith.



Blue Bird

Kaylee Medine

Global Warming

Eddie Gibson

Weep, weep, willow for our mother is dying
and can hold us no more.

What can we do to stop this crying our crying,
when she is only to be a memory finishing her last chore?

Now fire is on the edge, but remember how the children played under-
neath you,

pretending that your leaves and branches were an entrance to a secret
place.

So true this is, I know with surety; younger, but I was one of them too.

Our mother's eyes were on us. She crying with laughter, tears all over her
face.

In her grace conformed us to no trade. Oh weeping willow, go to your
perfect image.

Cry yes, but forget this woody flesh.

For our mother is dying, and is to be turned into a lasting vintage.

It will not spoil or spill this time, a perfect mesh.

Go now and don't look for me; I will stay

and hold her and be consumed by these poisonous flames until the next
day.

How To Breathe

Olivia Moon

It hurts to breathe sometimes
if you aren't really sure
you want to keep going.
It's hard to manage the weight
of the oxygen that forces your lungs
to stay awake and open.
But you suck in a gasp
like your life depends on it—
and in reality, it does—
and you drag it out for as long as you can
until you have to release it in a huff—
a weak, whimpering whine of a huff—
and you repeat the act again—
and again—and again—and again—
Until once again breathing comes naturally
and the ache against your ribs has dulled once more
to a slightly more bearable pain, like the fist of a child
beating fruitlessly against your chest.

Sallie

Kristen Hadley

I watched the cancer
decimate
her—the smell of
menthol cigarettes,
Diet Pepsi and Red Door perfume
replaced with the stale scent
of iodine and hospital beds,
sterile and sickening.

All Saints March In November

Clemonce Heard

Half way through the season field goals begin to fall through the uprights
You know those straight and narrow yellow poles of integrity
Halloween is substituted by black and gold
And the fleurs-de-lis take the pumpkins' position
It's cool outside; hopefully the beer breath of the fans can warm them up
As they strut down the fields with skull helmets, and anti- leaning shoulder pads
Cups filled to the rim with private parts, kneepads for huddled prayers
And skeleton cleats given away on All Soles Day
And the stadium is where all souls play catch with death
You drop a pass and that's your...tush
Yeah that's the rules Reggie Bush if you want to be a part of
This funeral of black ties, gold tuxes, and bent brimmed caps
You see here, we celebrate the dead, we believe
You ain't alive until you die so the mummies (mommies)
Don't cry when their sons fall to the gun
Cause the caskets got springs that propel their
Kids to be kings wrapped in wings
So why should anyone care about mourning when you know you'll
See your sun every day you wake up
There is no reason for makeup smearing tears
Forget crying I M-I-SS you Rivers
Let's take to the ferries so the first strings can second line
Cause there's no time to be sad
No time-outs left and we've run out of blood for red flags
But there's 2009 ways to skin a Colt
And don't we all want to be in that number
All trying to find a way to get 18 points without 3 sixes
An extra point is completion
All sevens go to heaven and all Saints were once sinners
So don't cry, cause God Drew the breeze
When he finished painting the skies
Instead let's rejoice with the zombies and commemorate All Saints
Let's cheer them on and party down famous whiskey streets
Until the break of bottles
But while your pores weep just remember
1, Football fields are nothing more than hundred yard cemeteries with end zone
2, when the horns blow everyone wants a halo
And 3, All Saints March in November

The Scheme Of A Siren

Patience Mattes

I sing a song of woe
to lure them in to me,
a lowly bunch of wearied men,
broken by the sea.

I lure them with my beauty,
a deceitful mask of lies.
As they're taken by the sea,
I hear their mournful cries.

The clever deceit masks
the promise of their death.
The light of morning cries
as she lays the men to rest.

The eternal pain of death
in the fiery blue sea
gives no rest for souls
as they sway among the weeds.

Love Makes Death Only A Period In Time

Eddie Gibson

Is love just a temporary thing made of moments, moments that have deceived us? Or is love this overwhelming feeling I have to help you and to be helped by you which prevents loneliness, our only death? If the latter is true, then we—more than you and me—have been given a life with love; its duration superseding flesh, but part of its time found within flesh as we are. We, particular creatures, that watch ourselves die, but not dying along with ourselves have been given this life, so live, you spirit, and fear not even death; let not death be goodbye, goodbye only this.

Sweet Caress

Raymond Gomez

Nervously, I tasseled your hair, a little tug, a little scratch. Rubbed your ear, you squirmed because it tickled. I let out my hot heavy breaths on you. I absorbed your entirely natural scent. It raged through me, making me feel... just feel. My heart raced, as if you were sleeping, and at any moment would wake up and catch me and hate me...but you didn't. You were nervous. Just as nervous or more so than I. Licking your tender dry lips, caused by your panting. You were nervous. You liked it. Running my fingertips from the top of your shoulder, slowly and softly to the bottom of your ear. Static. Electric. I was turned on. By an actual person. I hadn't even touched your torso yet. I almost quivered to think what may happen next. You stood, to show me your excitement. The result of my fingers and your hormones. I sat you down, and climbed on top of you. Opened my lips and placed them on the back of your neck. One kiss at a time, and not a peck, but a kiss. A little tongue and a little teeth each time. Slowly, working my way around. Your neck. Shoulder. Ear. Jaw line. Cheek.....lips. Tender, just as I had imagined. So soft. Sweet. Like chocolate...except I'm the one melting. And I did. I was a puddle of melted chocolate, waiting for you to mold and consume me. All of me. Every last ounce.

Cold Breeze

Marcus Lee

The sadness and hatred float in the cool breeze,
yet I seem to be the only one cold.
You refuse to listen to any of my pleas;

but I still continue to beg on my knees,
and I wait for that connection our eyes will hold.
The sadness and hatred float in the cool breeze.

The temperature drops a couple of degrees,
and now all is dark, what was once shining gold.
You refuse to listen to any of my pleas

because I placed the doubt, I planted the seeds,
and all that grows is nothing but mold.
The sadness and hatred float in the cool breeze,

and I feel like I can do nothing but freeze,
frozen in the folds of my cast aside mold.
You refuse to listen to any of my pleas.

I shake with desperation and shout out, "Please!"
and I notice your beautiful eyes—that rolled.
The sadness and hatred float in the cool breeze
while you continue to ignore all of my pleas.

In Praise Of SeCoNd fAilure

Amanda Sabala

The apple falls from the branches
a child straddles with thin legs.

Sliding and shimmying along the branch,
a sliver slits the skin along the leg.

Two more apples tumble down
to the green grass worn dead by feet.
They beg for something heavy to fall.

Willowy wrists shake from weight,
and the child grows tender and weak,
falling to clutching bones.
The adults dance and hug the child.

Surrender

Patience Mattes

In the center of my fortress,
hiding behind
the thick cold walls,
I stand alone,
prepared to fight.

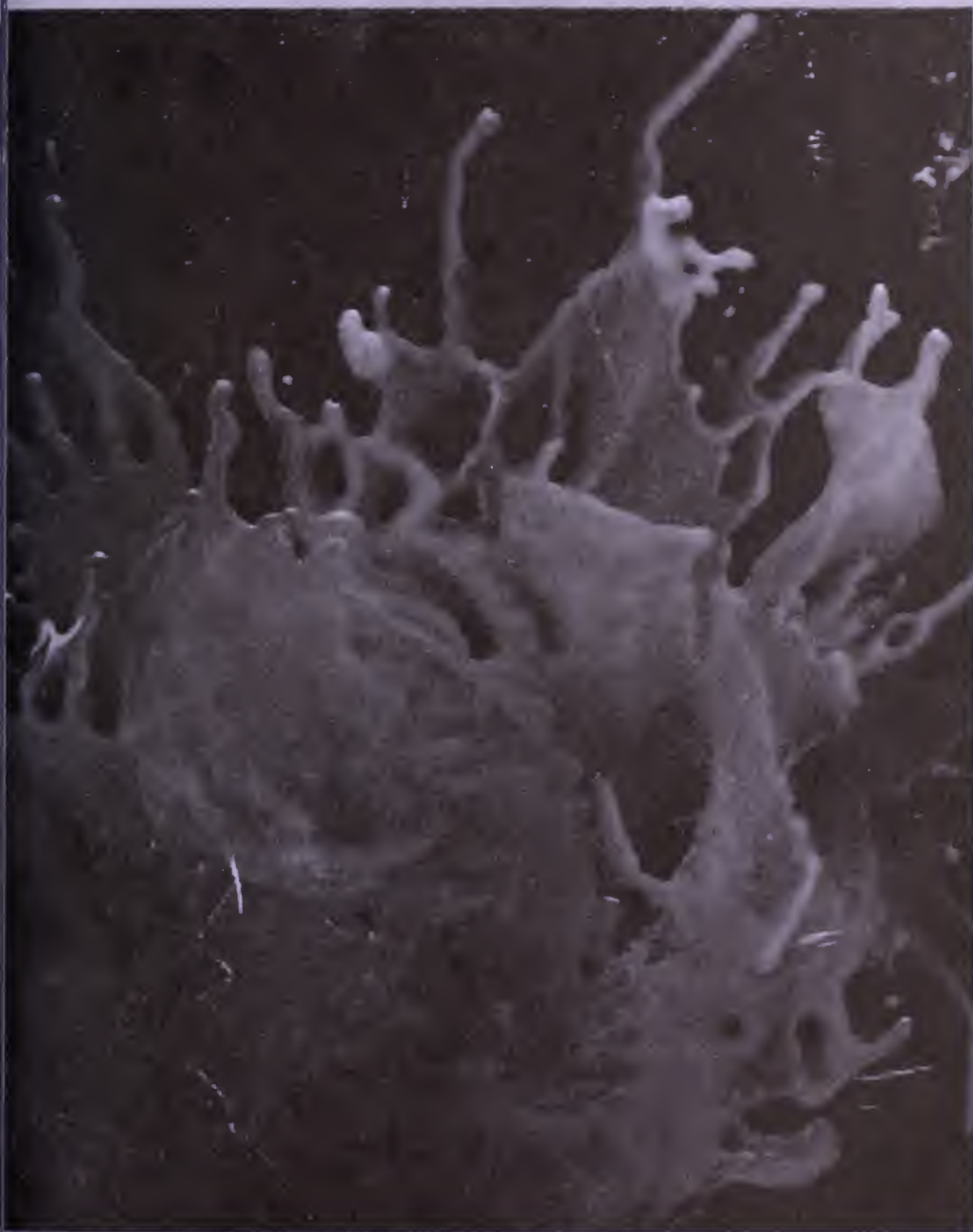
You come beckoning
with your army
of kind words and gestures.
I am ready for battle
as you call out to me,
your sweet artillery
careening into the cracks of
my weakening walls of solitude.

When your smaller attempts fail
to do more than rattle my guard,
your eyes grab me
and I buckle under myself.
Locked in your trance,
I am defenseless.

As your charming words smash relentlessly
into my fractured walls,
I feel my lonely sanctuary
begin to crumble.
I struggle under the falling bricks
and the heat from your dark eyes.

Unable to hold the weight
of my demolishing safety,
I let go.

Rubble collects at my feet
and I am left with
nothing but the thin cotton
of my clothes to shield me
from you.



Crayon Painting Experiment 1
Caitlin Pearce



Night Moth

Ethan McManus

1st Place



Victorian Gothic

Annabel Jones

1st Place



Day At The Beach
Victoria Burgess

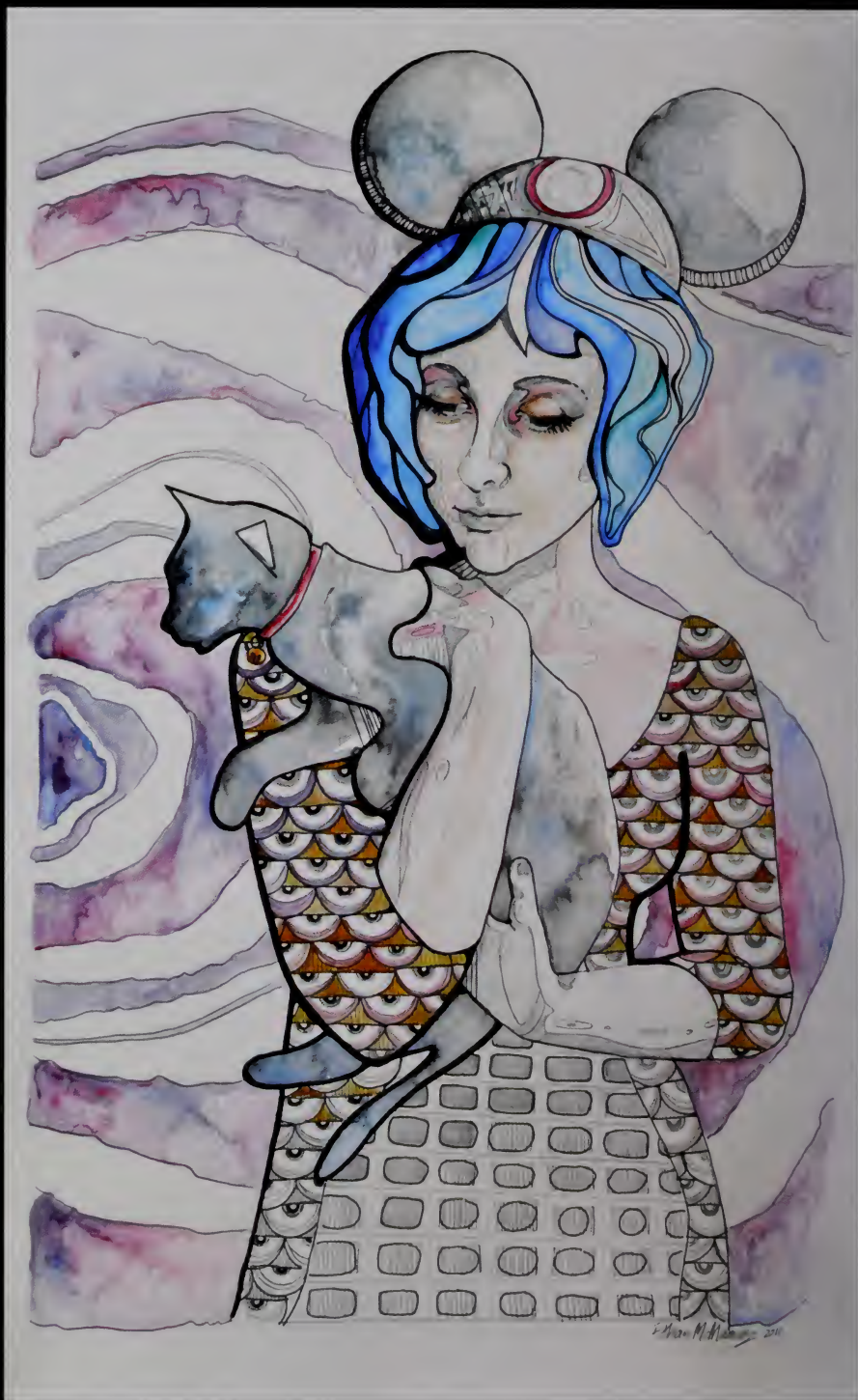
2nd Place



Cat And Mouse 2

Ethan McManus

2nd Place



Church Street Bridge

Annabel Jones

3rd Place



How To Eat Expensive Ice Cream

Ethan McManus

3rd Place



New Mexico Chili Peppers

Alicia Anderson



Christmas Lights On A White Fence

Derrick Notice





12:46 AM

Jacob Labutka

I pain at the splinter the aged dock mischievously left me after I felt its harsh bite. I soon get over the uncomfortable feeling that is left in my finger while the dock remains motionless, waiting to find its next victim. The Red River flows beneath and beyond with soft waves that barely utter a whisper. This peace almost makes me wonder why they would place a "No Swimming" sign upon entry to the dock, illustrated with a drowning stick figure, until I realize that the water is deeper than the tallest of foreigners, or at least deeper than the 78 inches that constitute my striking stature.

Across the water and past the screeching coyote howls, a light passes across the trees as if it is searching for something. The brevity of the light can only mean that its purpose is to be known, much like the thousand stars that reign above and illuminate the sky. Some shine bright and make their presence known, the younger stars strive to shine more and come together to be shown, and a few dimmer on and off like a candlelight waiting to be blown.

The crescent moon, which once lighted the sky, begins its descent and will soon be masked by the dark wall of trees that line the opposing shore. Reflection of the moonlight on the river fades away from the darkness that is below the dock my friends and I are sitting on. Any sound that could possibly be heard from the whispering of the wind is overpowered by my friends singing Hakuna Matata. While listening to that mostly offbeat chorus, I become distracted and sway slightly, to which one of my girlfriends thinks the worst of and comments, "For a second I assumed you fell and I thought death was happening!" Apparently falling three feet off the dock into the river combined with my knowledge of swimming would constitute my death.

Suddenly, a flash of light streams across the horizon. The air is cold for the first time this season, and I breathe in the moist and chilled air, reaching tranquility being the reason. I close my eyes, and when the star has shot, my wish is thought. From my thoughts I yearn for all traces of doubt to be erased, and I long for the gentle touch of a warm embrace.

The Glory Of The Damned

Lacey Hanemann

"Where do you wanna go?" he asks with a cigarette dangling from the left corner of his lips. The wind catches its smoldering tip, and the ashes dance around his neck. He doesn't notice, and I don't tell him. I just watch the dust waltz to the rhythm of the breeze.

"I don't know," I mumble not knowing the name of this town, much less where its torn roads lead.

As I light a Camel for myself, he responds, "Well then I suppose we'll get there."

"Wherever it may be," I whisper, and he laughs. Outside the Nola limits, still close enough to hear the city's endless groaning, we drive. Where, we don't know; why, we know even less. The air hangs heavy with moisture, a stifling certainty in its company. The draft falls few degrees beneath the stagnant setting that exists in its absence. I dangle my arm out of the window's cage, flattening it then shifting it palm forward to feel the wind wrestle its existence. New Orleans 7.

"Why back to the city?" I mutter in a tone more panicked than intended. He remains silent, vacant eyes staring eternally forward. I gaze towards the horizon still eager for an answer. He offers nothing; still we drive. The trees fuse into a single smear of withering green tint, interrupted briefly by the blinding reflection of the moon in murky water. As bark fades to stone, he stops the car. The concrete piles high until it lurks beside the stars, and I question why he brought me here.

"I like the cemetery. I don't know why, but I...I just feel so peaceful here. Like I'm already dead and I have nothing left to worry about."

After hearing his voice so shaken and honest, I say, "I get it, I think. Being surrounded by bodies that know all the answers makes the questions seem childish." He smiles, and I can see his dimples underneath his beard. We lie there for hours in laughter and quiet as the dry grass pricks skin in hope of rain. A dog's collar rattles to the melody of the wind, the owner's voice echoing out his name. Porch lights challenge the stars' heavy glow, but our eyes look up anyways.

A Cross On A Hill

Kaysee Carrere

2nd Place

The car door slams, and the gravel crunches beneath the young woman's feet as she strolls lazily down the path. Her navy TOMS step around the corner of the small trees separating the retreat center, her special place, from the nearby homes. Her long straight brunette hair catches the last bit of sunlight the day has left to offer and reflects back shades of red and brown. She approaches the bayou with a warm, subtle smile on her face as if she is greeting an old friend. The music of crickets and frogs dances around the bayou, which is slightly hidden by the thick blanket of fog floating just above the water's surface. She sits down near the water's edge and wraps her arms around her legs, and she rests her chin on her knees. She closes her eyes and begins to pray, her secret words enveloped by the sounds of a Louisiana evening.

After a few minutes, the mosquitoes force her away from the bayou, so she walks to the bottom of a nearby hill. The girl looks up and smiles in amazement at the pink and orange shades of dusk gently peeking around a giant wooden cross positioned at the top of the hill. She makes her way up the hill, and falls to her knees at the foot of the cross. The girl begins to pray again, and though her words cannot be heard, her feelings are obvious. She slowly shakes her head side to side, and each shake forces another tear down her cheeks. She lifts up her right hand and positions it to her heart, and her lips gracefully speak the words: "I'm sorry." She reaches out with the hand that once touched her heart and lets her fingertips run down the base of the cross. The girl wipes away the tears and stray mascara from her cheeks, and as she stands she takes a moment to take in the sight before her. She sees the wooden cross, but her smile says her heart understands the meaning of the sacrifice it represents.

She clumsily stumbles down the hill, and when she reaches the bottom she sits on a bench and pulls a crumpled photo from the pocket of her jeans. In the picture is a small foreign girl with short black hair and dark skin; the most precious memory from an eleven day adventure in India. The young woman lovingly smiles at the girl in the picture as if she were truly smiling back. She sighs deeply and places the photo back into her pocket. The girl rises from the bench and quickly glances over her shoulder and smiles at the cross that now knows the secrets of her heart. She starts up the gravel path towards her black car, which is nearly lost in what is now the Louisiana night. As she starts the engine and pulls out of the driveway, the peace of the cross, of the chirping crickets, and of the croaking frogs disappears into a distant memory. It is replaced by the car radio, the traffic, and the liveliness of the city just outside the boundaries of the retreat center.

A Tribute To A Fallen Soldier

Jill Kersey

His final words have been written, "A friend to many, a hero to us all," yet four tours of duty and we painfully learn, even heroes sometimes fall.

Some say he died fighting for our nation, and for that, there is no shame. Others say he died on evil soil, his life taken in certain vain.

I stand here now, filled with anger. My freedom of speech is a must. My heart is heavy, my soul is dark, still—in God, I have to trust. I will not protest, I will not accuse, only truths will I speak. I will not curl up, I will not cower down, it's comfort I long to seek.

His final words have been written, "I miss you bro," and "You will be forever missed." Four tours of duty and one quiet knock leave me standing here shaking my fist.

He was my son, he was a father, he was a husband and a dear friend. He was a Huntsman, he was a Soldier, our hero 'til the end.

I stand here now filled with anger, time I wish I could rewind. My hands are empty, my tears fall long—the answer I must find. I will not give up, I will not give in, this wrong I must make right. I will not sell out, I will not back down. Hell has no fury like a father's might.

His final words have been written, "Today we lost a great man." Four tours of duty, and I forever remain—my son's biggest fan.

For all things there isn't an answer. We must simply choose to concede. In these times of war and absolute uncertainty, my words the enemy should heed:

I stand here now filled with anger, but dear enemy, your time is yet to be. An eye for an eye, a soldier for a soldier, prayers you will surely need. I will not rest, I will not tire, through me, my son lives on; I will not waver, I will not bargain, dear enemy, your time will surely come. Watch your back. Proceed with caution. Be careful what you do—Hell has no fury like that of the nation adorned in red, white and blue.

A Bunny's Tale

Patrick Key

It was one of those early spring days when the temperature was still cold enough to be classified as a "Louisiana Winter." I was wandering around my family's yard (I probably went outside due to the fact that my Grandmother would turn the heater on 'til my face could melt into the walls) with no particular task in mind. I found myself heading to the backyard, and my eyes caught something thrashing.

We had an old fence that used to barricade something (who knows what... I've been told that a house used to stand there. At least a sidewalk and some old concrete steps were there to lend their silent testimony to that theory). In that fence, a bunny rabbit was trapped and half-seen due to the long dead weeds weaving their way through the rungs. I almost decided to leave it still struggling and whining and helpless. Then a morbid thought occurred to me: my neighbors had a Chihuahua.

I still cannot think of a death worse than "face mauled by Chihuahua," so I leaped into action (more like laughingly shuffled) and decided to save the bunny. I gently grasped its soft body trying my best not to hurt it. Its giant chocolate-jellybean eyes peered up at me while it froze in terror. I finally managed to get its leg through, and the lil' fella did the rest. It darted towards the trees that surrounded our yard. There was a road beyond those trees that had this wicked curve to it. If that damn rabbit got itself killed...

Anyway, this reflection makes me think back when I was around eight years old, and my two brothers, uncle, and I were playing in the weeds (the legal kind, mind you) and we spotted a snake. My playmates ran one direction and I another, and I swear that snake slithered across my shoe. I yelled, "Help!" and they all said no. Not the panicked "We are going to save you, dear family member! Just hold on!" type of no. It was just a simple, unemotional no. I kicked off my shoe and jumped out of the weeds with tears going into my mouth and nose. I am known to hold grudges like the queens and kings out of the Literature texts that my teachers make me read, but if I had left that bunny, I would have been just as bad as my family. Perhaps the bunny was Chuck Norris's or Lady Gaga's or The Mormons' way to teach me forgiveness.

Riverwalk, New Orleans

4:37

3rd Place

Jarred Roberts

It's hot. It's sooooo hot. Granted any month between February and October can be sweltering, but this July day brought its own brand of solar torture. A light wind coming off the river helps this a bit, but does little more than push around the sweat on your arms. A few steps to the left and you can just make out the sounds of a middle-aged man playing a saxophone. A few steps back to the right and you can make out exactly which animals the street performer is crafting from balloons; but no matter which way you step you see the birds, enough pigeons and seagulls to reenact a certain Hitchcock film.

The culmination of solar power and the feathered invasion proves too much as you tilt your head down in exhaustion. It's thanks to this act of lethargy you notice that each brick has a name inscribed upon it. Each name is different and you wonder what these people did to warrant being honored with a brick. Perhaps they are the fallen soldiers from the great pigeon war. Though, looking around, you can see that mankind wasn't exactly triumphant.

The sun continues to mean mug you to the point where staring at these memorials isn't worth it anymore. You decide to head inside. It's air-conditioned; you can grab lunch and possibly a piece of bread to appeal to the city birds' better nature. Maybe this way you can avoid becoming just like one of those bricks.

You make it into the colossal building with floors, shops, and restaurants en masse, where the interior seems obviously larger than the exterior. There are escalators to bring you up to some shops and stairs to bring you back down to even more. There's an elevator but as you've never witnessed an elevator on the other floors you are at least certain that whichever dimension it leads to has even more shops.

A plate of beignets shall serve your hunger needs at a second floor café. They come with a small white powdery mountain of cavities on top. Sitting near the window you see all the ships coming up and down the river, when you start to notice a few shapes approach the windowsill. Pigeons. You should leave soon before nightfall.

10:37 PM
Kristen Hadley

1st Place

Bourbon Street is sticky and crowded, people on every side, all kinds of smells and sounds and people, people, people. It's loud, almost too loud, but the alcohol tends to numb that a little. The drive is lined with electric ladies and daiquiri stands; the air is full of music. There's a chatter that doesn't seem to die away—no, it resounds, it resonates against wrought-iron balconies and cheap plastic beads.

The street itself hums, neon lights blinking like some miniature Vegas, rebuilt from water, rebuilt with Hurricanes and Hand Grenades and daiquiris of every flavor. We're strong, it sings, we survive. It lives up to its reputation—no, it does not disappoint, even with the drunks and the cops and the beer-soaked sidewalk, it slips and sinks and shocks. It's sweet like incense in a voodoo shop; it pulses, it moves like the jazz the city is built on, fluid and smooth. It stings like good whiskey, biting as the bourbon in the street's name.

The old and the new meet here, ghosts of Jean Lafitte and Marie Laveau warring with Tennessee Williams and Louis Armstrong. There are years of history, of battles and love affairs and sprawling stories, but it's music and it's drinking and it's life. The city and the street burst at the seams with some kind of age-old frenetic energy, spilling over almost tangibly in rock and blues and bad karaoke. It's music. It's life.

There's a cover band on the corner playing Don't Stop Believin' and somehow it feels like home. It's floating through the air, down through stiletto heels and plastic cups, around poles in cabarets and shots of whiskey. It's flittering and fleeting, but we wrap our fingers around it and grab hold, raising our glasses, singing along.

World Changer

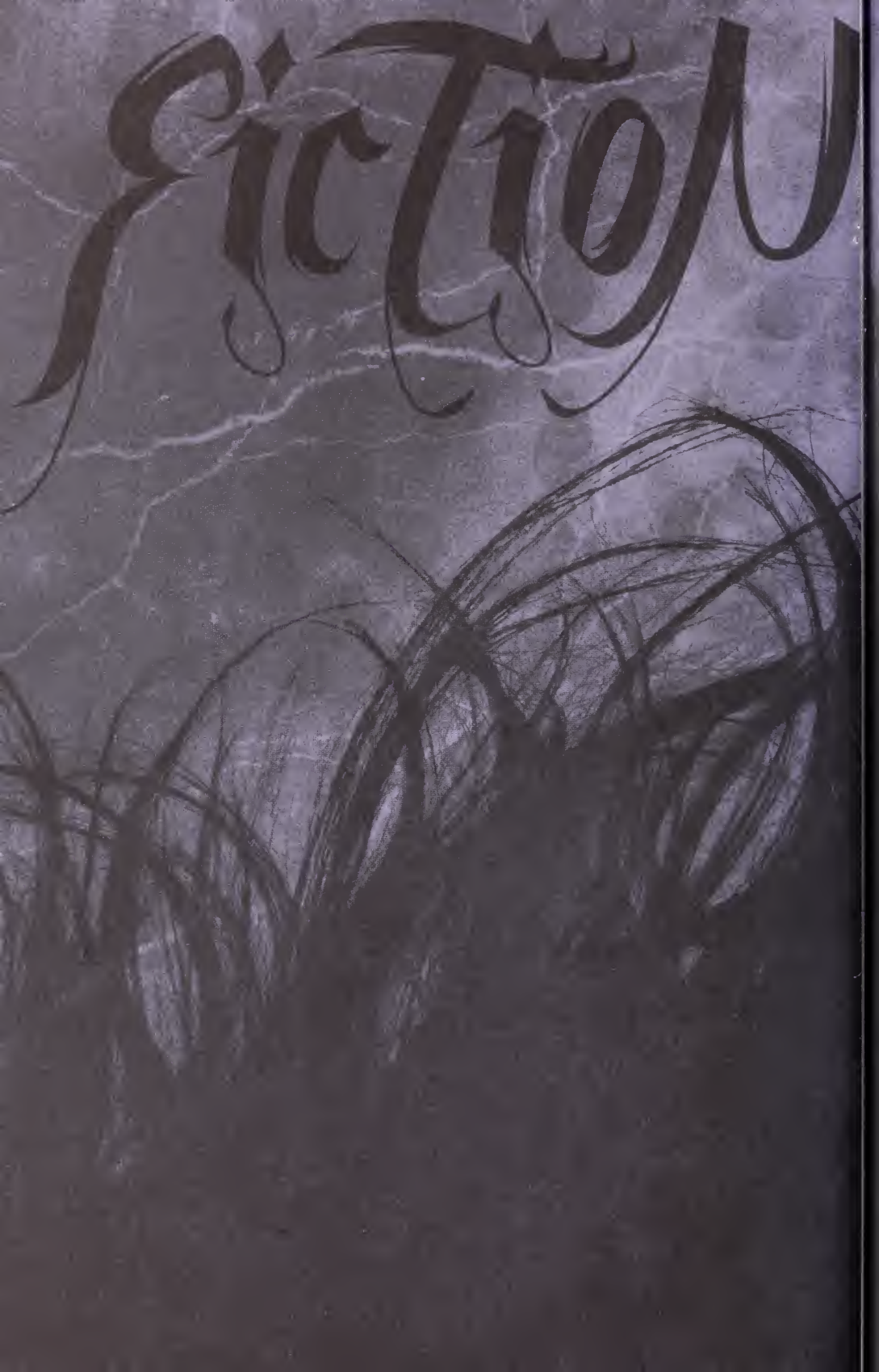
Megan Cole

You won't do it. Sorry, you just don't cut it. Are you sure you can do that? I hear them scream to me. Little do they know, exactly what it means to me. I'm way too often underestimated, but never investigated for many talents and abilities. People would say I'm shy, mean, and even unapproachable, which very well may be true, but have they really talked to me? No. You see me, I try not to send my judges by the smudges that I see on people's faces, but to most it's almost a foreign language because we are known as a society to judge by size, money, and races. Judgments really aren't my flavor. Would it do you any harm to return the favor?

I'm neither as shy nor as unapproachable as they think, and mean...that's just not me! But it isn't really stressing me, because I know that God is blessing me in ways I would never imagine. While half of the world is against me, I know that God commenced to change the cold hearts of the very people who hate me. You live in a fantasy world; wake up, they always tell me! If Christ is a fantasy I don't want to be real, because all that I'm doing is simply living in his will.

It's weird because I love them even though they hate me, but I guess that's why these very people await me. I'll warm their cold hearts if it takes all of me; determination is one of my best qualities.

So in this world I enter dodging many darts while I try so desperately to warm cold hearts. Hearts of the people I love. I promised never to give up on them, so daily I pray for them with a rare expectation, hoping that they will feel the transformation of vibration that their new heart makes.





LIFE WAR

Joe Waller

I'm at war. And chances are, if you're reading this, so are you. I've fought this war for as long as I can remember, but only recently have I found a way to gain the advantage. I now write this letter to give you this valuable information. Without it, you will not defeat the enemy. There is only one way to victory. Now, you must understand before I go on that what I have found will indeed ensure victory, but you will still wage war against the enemy. The total victory is not yet at hand, but until it comes, you will have help. I must sound very confusing right now, I know, and I apologize. Allow me to explain in more detail. Here is what I have learned. Use it to gain the victory.

As I went through life, I couldn't always see him. Sometimes things went well on my journey for so long that I forgot he was there. But it is when I least expect it that he attacks. More times than I can count, I've fought him, blow after blow, strike after strike, our swords crying out as we both fought through the blood and the pain. I soon learned that there was a bond between us somehow, for every time I dealt an injury to him, I felt the pain in my own body. Time after time I would drive my sword into the monster, delivering a crippling blow, only to feel crippled myself! More than that, he seemed to suffer less than I, so the more I would attack, the weaker I would get, and the more power he seemed to have over me. It soon became apparent that I couldn't kill him. His death would be mine. My enemy was stronger than I was as well. So strong in fact that more times than not, he would prevail in the fight! He would strike me down, leaving me helpless. But he never delivered the fatal blow. He would always bring me to near death, but would then leave me to wallow in my despair, only to come at me again at a later time to fight me.

He appears as a man engulfed in shadow. When he attacks, it is as if we fight in thick fog. A fog that clouds my vision yet has no effect on his. He seems to know my every move. It is a fight that I seem to have no hope in. I can see that I'm not alone in this fight, though. As I look around, I see many others with their own enemies close at hand. Some, like me, do their best to keep the monsters as far away as possible. Others embrace the beasts so that there are no longer two men, but one man shrouded in darkness. One thing I know: we cannot defeat these enemies on our own. But there is hope.

In my journey, I have met one who destroys these monsters. Light

seems to flow from him, and his gaze cuts through darkness. He is our King, and I first met him during battle one day. As he approached, the shadow creature began to burn. He began to panic, which made it easier to gain the advantage. As he fled though, he ran toward me and then vanished as he got close. I always wondered how he was always with me, but then it became clear. He hid inside of me. He was a part of me. I am my own enemy! As he fled from the light, he apparently tried to take me with him, for I felt his pain as the King drew near to me. I wanted to run, for the pain I felt was tremendous. But my King bid me stay, so stay I did. When he reached me, I was on the ground, for my enemy seemed to be ripping me apart from the inside. It was then that the King touched me, and immediately the pain began to fade. He picked me up and told me that He could defeat the monster inside of me for good if only I would submit to his rule. Though I always considered myself a solitary warrior, not needing help from anyone, I was weary from years of war. I knew that I couldn't win on my own, so I gladly accepted his offer and enlisted in his service. He then gave me a sword, the most expertly crafted sword I've ever seen, double-edged, and strong. He told me it would give me success in battle with the enemy. And his words have proven true. His sword almost seems to move on its own against my enemy! And when I use it, the pain I feel from attacking him becomes bearable. A few times I've tried to go back to my old weapons, but using them renders the same results as before. The closer I am to the King and his weapons and servants, the more success I have.

I tell you this to give you hope in your fight. I pray that you will find the King as I have and will let him save you from this war. As I said, you will still have to face yourself, but with the help of our King, you can overcome. Only through him though is this possible. Don't be led astray by those who say you can win with your own power. They lie. Through the years of war, I have noticed that the enemy doesn't usually attack when I'm with others in my company. Rather, he most often shows himself when I am alone or with those who have given in to their enemies. These are the times when I am weakest, as you will be. Also, when you feel strongest, feeling you can destroy anything in your path in your own power, he attacks then as well, as if to show you how foolish you really are. Don't be fooled. Be strong my friends, don't lose hope, and don't give in to the enemy. May the King be with you.

Sam And Buddy

Eddie Gibson

Late June in Hermanville, Mississippi, Kevin is walking into a Texaco gas station, and sees Sam and Buddy. They are two old men that always sit outside of the gas station, never really going inside. Sam wears thick bifocal glasses, and Buddy has on an old hat that used to say Fisherman's Paradise on it. They are arguing about one of Muddy Waters' songs; Buddy is winning. Sam starts talking about Robert Johnson. He knows Robert Johnson is Buddy's favorite musician.

Sam says, "Yap, he was wit the Devil. Don't nobody learn to play a guitar that fast."

Buddy turns to Sam frowning, "How you know? He coulda learned. I heard that boy use to play from sun up to sun down after his wife passed."

Sam stops Kevin and says, "What you thank? Wit the Devil or agains'um."

"I don't know, Sir."

"You must know some'uhm. You got on glasses and a tie."

Kevin and Sam start laughing, but Buddy is still frowning. Buddy says, "Sam, leave that boy alone."

Kevin walks into the store and sees the case of water he came to buy. He reaches down and starts to lift the case up. As he lifts the case, he turns and sees both of his girlfriends. Kevin falls down and drops the water. He crouches down behind the other cases of water in the store, and peeps around them. Stacey's red hair falls out of its ponytail as she slams the car door. She has just gotten off work from Save-A-Lot. Shonda, Kevin's other friend, doesn't work; she goes to Alcorn State University. She is looking at her reflection in her tinted car window. Shonda's long black hair is lying on her shoulders, and she is wearing a white blouse and a light brown skirt. Stacey does not know her, but she looks at her and frowns. Shonda does not see her. Kevin sees this and shakes his head. He stays crouched down, but turns and bumps in to a little boy that is doing everything that he is doing.

Kevin says, "Little boy, please stop."

The little boy just smiles and says, "Please stop! Mister, you scared of girls too."

"Where yo mama at?"

"She at home. She sent me to get some cigarettes for Lenard."

"You better go take them to her."

"I told you they for Lenard. I don't like Lenard. He look funny."

By this time both Stacey and Shonda make it to where Sam and Buddy are sitting. Sam looks at Shonda. His glasses almost falling off his face, he says, "Is he a devil or a main?"

Shonda responds, "Sir?"

"Robert Johnson. Is he a devil or a main?"

"I don't know, Sir."

Buddy is just shaking his head. Stacey pats Sam on his shoulder and says, "Mr. Sam, leave this lady alone. She don't want to talk to you."

"Why not? She the upper class?"

Shonda touches Sam on his shoulder and says, "No, Sir. I just didn't understand what you meant."

Sam looks at Buddy and smiles, and Buddy just shakes his head. All the while these things are happening, people are coming in and out of the gas station, some are paying for gas, some are buying food and water, and others are using the bathroom while Kevin and the little boy are still bending down by the stacks of water. People are looking at them, wondering, but not asking them anything. After most of the people leave out of the store the clerk says, "What are y'all doing?" Kevin explains to the clerk, and the clerk just nods and goes back to the cash register. Shonda and Stacey finally make it into the store. They are talking to each other as they walk in. Kevin sees them and crawls to the next aisle. When he looks back there are three other little boys crawling behind him. Kevin doesn't say anything. He just turns around and keeps crawling to the back of the aisle, and when he gets there, he peeps around it. Stacey is paying for gas and Shonda is buying a pack of gum. They both leave out of the store.

Sam knows that Kevin is dating Stacey, and he has seen him with Shonda a few times. The whole time Sam was talking to Stacey and Shonda before they went into the store, he could see Kevin crouched down watching them. When the two women get outside, Sam looks at Buddy. Buddy just shakes his head and pulls his hat farther down.

Sam says, "Stacey, could ya get me some Vicks for ma chest. I don't know what shelf it's on."

She goes back into the store, and Kevin says, "I can't believe this."

Shonda starts to walk to her car and Sam asks her, "Ain't you Kevin's friend?"

"Yes, but we are closer than friends."

"You didn't see um in the stow?"

"No, I didn't."

"Look, there he is peeping at Stacey."

"What is he doing?"

"I don't know, but it don't look good."

Shonda walks into the store watching Kevin trying to explain to Stacey why he was crawling on the floor. The little children are standing around him with their heads hanging down as if they know he is in trouble. When Shonda gets close to them she asks Kevin, "What are you doing?" Kevin doesn't see her until after she speaks.

He turns toward Shonda and says, "I...Well, I...don't know."

Stacey asks Kevin, "How do you know her?"

"I... I don't know."

"You don't know how you know her?"

Shonda interrupts them, "You don't know how you know me, Kevin?"

Stacey frowns at Shonda and says, "Don't you interrupt me while I'm talking. I'm somebody too."

While looking at Shonda, Stacey points her finger and pushes Kevin's head back while saying, "Don't you ever interrupt me while I'm talking to this fool."

Shonda grabs Stacey's finger and says, "Don't you touch him like that!" Stacey punches Shonda in the stomach. Then Shonda grabs Stacey and trips her to the floor, and they both start rolling around on the already stained floor. Bags of Doritos, Skittles, honey buns and water are flying everywhere.

The clerk is yelling, "Please stop!" but they just keep fighting; so he calls the police. The little children and Kevin are still standing in the same spot they were in when they raised themselves from the floor after Stacey saw them.

Sam and Buddy are watching the fight when they hear the police coming to the store. Sam looks at Buddy and says, "Young kids today just don't know how'd act. They just out of control with all that fighting and cussing." Buddy just shakes his head.

Sam looks at Buddy grinning, "You know what I mean?"

"Yah Sam, I know what you mean."

A Curious Story

Erich Tanner

While everything that happened that fateful day is charred into my memory and body, I have a certain difficulty remembering it without wondering if I have not somehow steeped the events in my imagination. They are so far from what should be normal and average that they seem grotesque and born of mistruths. But I must dash that speculation from both our minds and assure you that there is only truth, only reality, in the tale you are about to hear. It is the same story I told the police officers when they found me that afternoon in the back of my hardware store, broken and maimed.

The hardware store I own is not the kind of place someone comes to buy lumber or nails or hammers. It is the type of store people browse through looking for knick-knacks and items no longer mass-produced. If you have an antique gas lantern for camping, I have the parts you need to get that sucker running. Needless to say, I look at it as more of a museum in which I sometimes sell artifacts, rather than a real business; something I do to stay busy.

It could not have been later than ten o'clock that Monday morning. I had decided to close for the day and do some basic cleaning. I did leave the front door open in case someone happened to come by, but I wasn't expecting it. Unfortunately, someone did just that.

The bell on the door jingled and I looked up from behind the register to see who it was. There stood a tall, lanky man dressed in what appeared to be a bright-yellow, polyester, safari suit. On his feet he wore a pair of brown, knee-high, lace-up boots that shone like polished mirrors. And to finish the costume off, he had a large, rather pointed, yellow hat just as bright and polyester as the suit, but not in accord with the safari theme.

He would have been unsettling enough alone, but as if it was an accessory for the suit, he walked in with a medium size chimp. The chimp held onto the man in yellow's hand and waddled alongside him to my register. From the doorway I was unable to see the man's face clearly, but I received the royal treatment when he got up close.

"Hello there," the man in yellow said briskly.

"How are you?" I responded.

"Doing well, doing well. I have been looking for plant fertilizer with my friend George here and we figured we should stop in and see what you had."

When he said this, one of his eyes darted off and about, like a pool ball bounced from the table. I noticed he had an inane grin full of brown nugget teeth to accompany that roaming eye and wondered what sort of lunatic I was dealing with.

"I don't actually sell any fertilizer. Really, I don't sell anything you might normally find in a hardware store. You could say this is more of an antique repair shop."

"Ah, George loves antiques. Don't you, George?"

At this point the man reached down and kissed the beast full on the lips and the chimp responded by sliding his tongue inside and around the man mouth. As I tried to look somewhere else as this revolting spectacle occurred, my eyes fell to the chimp's free hand. It was covered in some sort of dry-wet filth, feces perhaps, I couldn't be sure.

"George is a curious animal and has always enjoyed perusing the relics of mankind's progression. I happen to find myself in quite a quandary. While I have prior engagements, I believe George would love to stay and fiddle with some of your contraptions."

I cut him off there. "I don't know how I feel about you wandering through my business with your animal."

"An animal, sir? An animal? George is one of the most civilized people you will ever meet. Come George, let us walk."

I had no idea what to say. I should have thrown the maniac out on his rear, but I held back, both out of common courtesy and what can only be described as a divinely ordained need to let the narrative unfold. They wandered a little down the main aisle and I suppose something piqued George's interest because he darted down the aisle that I kept my assorted screws and bolts on. The man paused and turned to look at me.

"George seems to have found something to his liking. I am going to run a few errands and I shall return when I am done. Thank you, friend."

With that he briskly strode to the door and before I could reach him he had hopped in his baby-blue two-seater and drove off. I froze. I was suddenly lost in a place I had known for years, almost as if I was no longer the author of my future but instead the hapless victim of a demented bedtime story. The man had left me to care for his chimp, and he had done it as if it was something he did every day. I stood there for several minutes wondering what quality of person did a thing like that and where that type of person could gain possession of a chimp. I did not move until a sudden racket broke me from my trance. I quickly turned to look and see what damage the beast had done.

I breathed a sigh of relief. All George had done was to pull down a bucket of nails and slam it playfully on the floor. I smiled at him and he smiled back. It was as if I suddenly felt some sort of fatherly pride for this animal I knew nothing of and had no ties to. The best comparison I can summon is the possession of a body by an alien spirit.

"You just wanted to see what they sounded like on the floor didn't you, George?" I cooed. This tone brought about a sudden change in his demeanor. He traded his smile for what I can only describe as a furious glare. I went from playful

guardian to confused, babbling dolt.

"George, I didn't mean to talk to you that way. You're my little man." For some reason those words came out in the same demeaning tone the others had. In response to this George grabbed a handful of nails out of the bucket and hurled them at me at what had to have been fastball speeds. Two went through my right cheek, one of which planted itself in my gum line. Four of them landed with a shotgun style splatter effect across my chest and abdomen and the final five scattered themselves on my right arm and leg. If a man had attacked me in the way George did I would have rushed to the telephone to dial the police but because it was a pet that I had been entrusted with; albeit, entrusted without consent, I felt guilt at the attack I had provoked.

I hurriedly removed the nails from my mouth, and as I wrenched the others from their puncture points I tried to calm George down, as if I owed it to the irresponsible man in yellow who had randomly selected me for guardian of the day.

"George, I'm very sorry. I didn't mean to talk down to you. I know you are a conscious being who understands what's going on. Really, just look around and see if you have questions about anything. If you do, I have the answers."

With that George moved away to continue with his delving. I checked to see if I had stocked the first aid kit. Unfortunately, all I had were band-aids, the small circle kind, and due to the amount of blood coming from the nail holes, they would not stick. No matter though, I ripped up two cleaning rags and tied off the areas that I could. As far as the holes in my mouth went, I gargled a little hydrogen peroxide and prayed my mouth was really the fastest healing part of my body.

I nursed my wounds and listened to see what George was doing. The sound of crashing tools and clanging metal coming from the center of the store told me he was doing just fine, and for some bizarre reason, almost as if this incident was divinely ordained, I felt a sudden concern for George and whether or not he was enjoying himself.

Suddenly, as if he knew that I had decided to worry about his well being, the animal charged from the middle of the store to the backdoor and into a thick plot of grass outside in the back. I limped out behind and discovered him climbing on a small lemon tree I had planted some years before. It was still young and could not hold George's weight. The plant was crushed and George was pulverizing the only lemon growing on it.

Now, I admit this did frustrate me and perhaps I did grab his wrist with a little too much force to lead him back inside, but I tell you truly, it was just a side effect of passion and earnestness. Lucky for me, I am right handed and instead of using my right, I opted to grab with the left. As I tried to pull him off of my tree, he grasped my arm with his free hand and snapped it at the elbow like kindling. When I howled in pain, I could swear he grinned at the sharp screaming coming out of my mouth.

I did not reprimand him for the injury but chose instead to prioritize and

ran back into the store to construct a makeshift splint that would keep my arm in place until the man in yellow returned, picked up his pet, and allowed me to visit a hospital, or maybe just phone an ambulance.

George followed me back inside and tried to comfort me by wiping at my nail holes with his filthy hand. Perhaps if I was not absorbed in the details of a splint made from plywood I could have stopped him. I especially would have stopped him if I had known the filth was his excrement. I put two and two together later when the doctors told me the fever I had could only be contracted through direct fecal application.

There I sat, poop in my wounds and my arm wrapped up as only an amateur could. George moved off and began playing with whatever it was he wanted to at the moment. I paid him no attention and felt it was in my best interest to keep a good distance between the two of us and physical contact to a minimum.

I kept the distance and there was no contact; yet George overcame those obstacles. I was making my way to the bathroom when I heard a low hoot followed by a humming vibration coming from across the store and turned in time to see a harpoon slam through my thigh and pin me to the wall. George approached and looked at me like I was an archery target on which he had just hit a bull's eye and clapped his hands after he did a quick examination of my impaled leg.

He celebrated by swinging from the rafters and followed that up by demolishing a few shelves of ceramic pottery, but grew remorseful after his initial excitement. I was left standing, pinned to the wall, crying, and as if he knew he had done wrong and wanted to make up for it he stroked my head and neck. The gesture was meant to comfort me but the animal did not know his own strength or perhaps he did not know the frailty of the human spine. It was on one particular stroke that I felt a sharp pain in the base of my neck. Later x-rays showed that George had herniated a few of the discs between my shoulders and skull.

Throughout this entire ordeal my decision making and sense of self had slipped into some sort of twilight zone coma. I didn't try to get to my cell phone and call the police. Not once did I consider trying to reach animal control. Never did it cross my mind to get medical attention. My sole concern was on making sure George had a good time.

Following the havoc he wreaked on my vertebrae he let me know through a series of gestures and intimations that he meant to fix the harpoon through my leg. I motioned back that it would probably be best to wait and let a human being, preferably a doctor, take a look at it. George obviously did not feel the same way.

He pulled once and it did not budge out of the wall. He pulled twice and there was a little give that I could feel as it vibrated against my thighbone. On the third attempt he got it. However, he yanked so hard that it tore through my hamstring and quads, the muscle and sinew of which blossomed out the front of my leg in a meat lily.

When I say it was ridiculously hard tying off my leg with the use of only one

arm and my mouth, I mean it. I was lightheaded and George wasn't helping things. He knocked over three more of the shelves and wandered into the only bathroom I had on the property and wrenched the toilet out of the floor. At any other time I would have been concerned with these damages but in the state I was in, they seemed petty and inconsequential.

What was not petty and inconsequential was that he broke into the antique gun case behind the register. I never looked up, but my worst fears were realized when the tip of a bayonet suddenly appeared on the lower left side of my abdomen and made six other appearances through my chest and stomach. He missed my heart but severed my lower spine and became agitated when I refused to get up. The poor beast was unaware I could no longer feel from my waist down.

The man in yellow must have subscribed to negative reinforcement because after George realized I was not going to get up, he grabbed a shovel and repeatedly struck me in the chest with it. The action seemed instinctual, and I believe it fell under the nurture not nature category. One or two of these blows went a smidgen high and caught me in the face damaging my teeth and much of the bone structure I used to have. It was also at this point that one of my lungs collapsed and I resigned to gasping for breath and waiting for death. George moved on and began ripping up floorboards when I heard a car pull up outside.

"George, my goodness. Have you been a bad boy?" the man in yellow jovially boomed. "Now, where is the proprietor of the establishment?"

"Right over here," I managed to gasp out in between dying breaths. The man in yellow rushed over and took my condition in a glance.

"You don't look well friend, but you've done a bang up job on the bandages." I attempted to say thanks for the compliment but could only gurgle.

"Collapsed lung, eh? Not to worry." He sprinted over to what was left of the front desk and grabbed a pencil. As soon as he made it back to me he stabbed it through my chest and I felt the air rush back into my lung.

"Thank god you showed up. I was never going to make it out of here alive," I gasped.

"Well, I found my fertilizer and headed right back over. Guess I made it back right in time. I do believe that more than a pencil is required to fix your condition though, friend."

He removed a cell phone from the chest pocket of his polyester suit and hit one of the numbers on the pad. I realize now that he had 911 on speed dial.

"Hello? Yes, I have a man here in bad shape. Looks like he has a collapsed lung, several broken bones, damage to his face, the list goes on. I'd say he's damn near close to death. Yes, let's see. What is the name of this store?"

"Mitchell's. Mitchell's Hardware," I stuttered out.

"He's at Mitchell's Hardware. That's right. My name? Don't see how that will help."

With that he hung up and looked down at me.

"Much thanks for watching George. I believe he really enjoyed himself and best of luck with the business."

With that they walked out in the same manner they had walked in, hand in hand. Except this time, when they reached the door, George pooped in his free hand and flung it on the floor. The man in yellow waved goodbye over his shoulder and they disappeared along with the deep acceleration of his old sportster.

I sat there in the main aisle and waited, dying, for five minutes before the police and ambulance arrived. They say I was unable to speak and that I slipped into a coma-like sleep for three days before I finally regained my senses. It was then I found out the loss of movement I had below my waist was permanent; that my arm had been amputated; that I needed dentures; that I had light brain damage after the shovel incident and would consequently never be able to handle simple mathematics; that my nail wounds were infected; that I needed a series of surgeries to repair my chest and innards; that most of my ribs were shattered; that I would need to carry an oxygen machine everywhere I went; that I would never be comfortable at the zoo or around anything yellow for that matter; that my business had been completely destroyed; and not that it mattered much, but the lemon tree out back behind the store would never again bear fruit.

They asked me why I had not called anyone. Why I had not tried to get out of there after the chimp had first attacked me. I could give no explanation. All I could tell them was that I had felt a certain need to care for the thing at all cost, as if it was not my place to dictate what happened next.

It was here that they told me there were others like me. Other disfigured idiots who had allowed themselves to be brutalized by the same mysterious man and his ruthless companion. I was amazed, and oddly enough, I was happy that I was not the lone moron who had allowed these things to happen. We, the victims of George and the man in yellow, who still have our vision, keep an eye out for him to this day, but the only trace they seem to leave is a trail of mutilated fools.



Pinky Poodle
Caitlin Pearce

Paranoid

Charles Crain

2nd Place

The dark New York skyline reflects off of the Hudson like a warped mirror. This is the time of night when the city seems to stand still, when only the riffraff make their presence known and wholesome people stay out of this part of town. No one blinks an eye when a cop patrols this neighborhood. I guess that's why I've been able to do this for so long. They think I'm just on the lookout for pimps or the occasional drug deal. It's that part of town. The badge gives me away, but it's also my shield.

"Hey mister," says a voice in the shadows, "how about some fun?" I set down my bag and face her. Her smile disappears when she notices the uniform.

"Scuse me, just lookin' for a friend." She disappears back into the shadows. I pick up my bag and continue on my trek. It's that part of town.

I think back to when it all started. The good times didn't last long, but they gave me hope. I had time back then, time to plan and time to dream. I had friends. My wife was beautiful, and we painted the nursery yellow. Yellow is a good color; neutral. The good times never last as long as you think they will.

The good times ended when I found out about her secret. She tried to hide it, but I'm a detective. It's my job to be suspicious, to find a hole in a suspect's story or find the one tell that gives them away. She had to know that I'd find out. She knew me.

The bag starts to wear on my shoulder. Not too much further now. I've made this walk six times before, and every trip has been easier than the last. I should probably buy some new shoes tomorrow, though. My dogs are barking.

It's almost that time. For now, the itch has been scratched. Maybe next time will be different; maybe they'll stop the lying. But they never stop, and the itch returns. They force my hand. They love the scratch; I just know they do. Otherwise, they wouldn't keep asking for it.

The end of the pavement is always the hardest part, having to maneuver down the muddy slope to reach the riverbank. Almost there, guy. The ground is wet and the sludge smells to high heaven, but you'll make it.

After I caught her in the lie, I had hoped that she could make me believe that I was wrong. I wanted to be wrong, I really did. But what was I supposed to do? The lie was too big and too obvious. She told me that I was crazy, paranoid. She even said that she had become scared of me since the pregnancy, one of her tactics to make me second-guess myself. I thought she

was different.

It was a messy break-up. I still haven't really gotten over it. The baby was supposed to be due soon, but I wouldn't know where to find her. I bought some yellow sleepers to take to the hospital.

I toss the bag into the pipe and climb inside. Just a few more feet to go, then I can call it a night. It's so dark and quiet; you can almost see your thoughts. I know my way by now, but the darkness still takes your breath away. Did I imagine this would happen, back in the good times? We're never really prepared for when the good times end, we just cope with the loss. I guess some cope better than others.

I've finally reached my destination. It's dark and secluded, totally hidden from the outside world. It's my own little piece of darkness, where secrets and lies go to die. I drop the bag on top of the others. This makes seven, lucky number seven. I thought she would be different too. I thought they all would be different.

I make my way out of the darkness and back to the riverbank. Morning is coming soon, and I have work tomorrow. I saw a notice on my desk before I left yesterday. Apparently women have been disappearing all over the city. There doesn't seem to be a connection in their disappearances, not even a pattern to follow.

They want me to start combing this area of the city. I'm not sure why.

I guess because it's that part of town.

The Art Of Keeping a Secret

Ebony Freemount

If I were able to see the future before it happens I may have just stayed away from the Dixons altogether. Demi and I met at Old Navy, because we had to attend the orientation for new employees together. She really didn't look like she was older than fifteen, because she was so short and she always wore jeans with holes in them. She wore graphic tees most of the time when I saw her at work, and for some reason I would associate graphic tees and holey jeans plus her shortness with that of a teenager. I was about to graduate high school and Demi had attended Howard University in D.C. for about a year and a half before she moved to Louisiana. I would always make fun of her accent, because she was from New Jersey and she would say "Yo" and "Son" in almost every sentence. She had moved to Louisiana to live with her father, which puzzled me. There isn't much to do here compared to a big city like Newark. I almost wish that she would've stayed in Jersey so that she wouldn't have to suffer.

Demi and I had grown closer to each other over the couple of months that we had been working together. I guess that she liked me enough to introduce me to her father, and one day she did. Demi and I were planning to go see a movie and hang out at the boardwalk and I had to pick her up, which required that I meet her father. It was very hot outside, and I mean the humid, Louisiana heat that makes your hair frizz up every time you walk outside. I had on a combination of layered camisoles and skinny jeans, which was trendy at the time according to the Old Navy Catalog. I, of course, wore the darker colors, because I didn't believe that dark-skinned girls could pull off bright colors and look decent. Demi didn't have this problem, because she was white. I pulled up at the apartment complex that Demi and her father were staying in. I was a little reluctant to knock on the door, because I don't like meeting parents. I gave the door a few light, quick taps and I heard a baby whining, almost as if it was a response to my knocking. Demi answered the door with a baby on her hip and a really bright smile. That was one of the special things about her. "Hi, Maxi!" she said enthusiastically.

"Hey, Dee, what's up?" I responded with less enthusiasm.

"Nothing, girl. This is my son, Jaden."

"Awe...Hi, Jaden," I said playing with his hands, "How old is he?"

"He'll be one in August." Jaden was a cute little chubby baby. He had a weird hair-do, though. It sort of reminded me of Don King, but way cuter. "And this is my dad," she said waving her arm so if to present her

dad.

"Hi, Dad," I said.

"Hello. What did you say your name was? Maxi?"

"Yes, sir, that's it."

"And what is your denomination, Maxi?"

"Huh?"

"Are you a Christian?"

"Yes."

"Oh, okay. You sounded hesitant."

"Yeah. Well, I wasn't used to that word."

"Denomination?"

"Yes, Sir." I almost thought that Demi's dad was a cop, because of the way he interrogated me. He must've really cared about whom his daughter hung out with, but Demi was 23. I didn't even have time to ask for his name, because of all his questions. So, he remained unnamed for about a year.

When I actually started college, Demi's Dad and I never really talked unless I needed an interpretation of a Bible verse or unless I was inviting him to one of my dance recitals or something. He appreciated the fact that I was an athlete and tried to help me when he could. He would let me use the gym that the policeman and firefighters of the city used, because he also worked for the city and he had a key.

When summer rolled around the next year, I needed a place to stay since my folks had been stationed in Florida. My best friend Shanequa had offered to let me crash at her place, but I spent most of my daylight hours at Demi's Dad's house. Demi was able to get her own apartment and her fiancé had flown from New Jersey to stay with her and Jaden. Demi's little sister Lee had also flown down to Louisiana to live with Demi's Dad, because none of her relatives back East could control her.

"What's your mother like?" I asked Demi one day while we were fitting her for a wedding dress at David's Bridal. Demi didn't really give me an answer; she just sort of gave me a dirty look and continued to admire herself in the mirror.

"Well, excuse me," I whispered to myself. After a while it became a little harder for Demi and me to hang out, because her fiancé Michael was an asshole. Way too controlling. She could barely leave the house. One day I was sitting on Demi's porch and her dad strolled up with Jaden. "What are you doing out here?" he asked.

"Nothing. Demi and Michael are arguing and I thought I would weather it out, out here."

"Really," he chuckled, "Here, hold Jaden."

"What if he starts crying?"

"Don't worry. I have a trick," he said taking out a pacifier and giving it to me.

"Put this in his mouth when he starts to cry."

"Okay," I said worriedly. A few minutes later Demi came outside looking a little pissed, so I offered to leave.

"I'll just see you later, Maxi."

"Okay, ma'am. Later, dude." As I started to walk off, Demi's Dad caught up with me.

"Where you headed?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Wanna hang out at my place? I can feed you."

"Why not. You know I cannot possibly turn down food. What exactly is your name?" I asked sarcastically.

"Kevin."

"Kevin? Kevin, what?"

"Kevin Lamont Dixon."

"Well, I'll call you Lamont. I don't really like 'Kevin'."

"Okay." I felt comfortable around Kevin, because he seemed to be a decent man and I knew that he admired me, and everything that I did in high school and college. I sensed that he may have been the slightest bit attracted to me, because he would throw little comments at me about how he liked the way my body looked. That night Kevin and I were watching a movie. He was asking me about my belly ring because Lee asked if she could have one.

"Sure, you can see it, hun," I said lifting up my shirt and showing him my belly, "But Lee is only fifteen, so she should probably wait." I noticed Kevin staring at my stomach. I didn't mind, though, because he was just a harmless old man. He didn't look old, which was weird, because he was retired from a service of 26 years in the military. I thought the military might age someone if anything. All of a sudden I felt a hand gliding smoothly up and down my stomach. I looked up and Kevin was about two inches away from my face, staring into my eyes. I wanted to tell him to stop because my stomach was a sensitive spot for me when he touched it softly like that, but instead I stared back into his eyes. I always liked his eyes, because they were light brown and they always looked happy, even when he was sad. He continued to run his hands across my stomach and when he sensed no resistance from me, his hands ventured to other parts of my body. His hands started to caress my thighs. I started taking deep breaths and I felt my body getting more aroused each second. I closed my eyes to relax and succumb to the feeling that was taking over and I felt lips touching mine. I opened my eyes and saw him kissing me carefully. I closed my eyes and welcomed it. His lips felt as though they had molded to the

shape of my lips; like we were supposed to be doing this.

When he felt more comfortable, Kevin started to feel all the curves on my body. He started with my chest and ended up squeezing my butt. It was very intense and I welcomed every touch. He pulled my shirt off and began to kiss all over my breasts. He kissed all the spots that made me jump as if he were a professional. As soon as he slid his fingers up and down my moist spot it was all over. I would let him have me however he wanted me. He backed away from me, never taking his eyes off me. Within seconds my pants were on the other side of the of the room and Kevin had climbed on top of me to take my innocence over and over again that night.

When he had finished, Kevin looked at me with passionate, honest eyes, and I trusted him not to hurt me in any way. He laid his head on my chest and I rubbed his back, thinking to myself. I was the only person that I knew of that had slept or would sleep with her friend's dad. I was not surprised at myself though, and I would do it again. The hard part was keeping it a secret. If I wanted to keep the peace around Demi I would have to. Either way, I was not going to give up the old man. I was hooked, now. But I couldn't tell anyone. So I had no choice but to master the art of keeping a secret.

America: The Largest Exporter Of Zombies

Khirsten Doolan

3rd Place

Ironically, it didn't start in a small town in Louisiana. It started outside of Highland Park, Colorado. The clouds were moving across the sky, but the sun was still out, shining on the quaint little buildings and the mountains that lurked in the distance. It was a fine day for an apocalypse.

I had just taken my first sip of Starbucks in months when someone gurgled and groaned in the line behind me. It was six in the evening so I wrote it off as someone in desperate need of a venti peppermint mocha pick-me-up after a long day. I began to be a little suspicious when I slid into my vehicle. Pandemonium erupted inside. That guy really wanted his coffee and he wanted it right then. As I took a sip of my own coffee, the screaming began inside.

"Hmm," I mumbled as I put the Jeep into drive. "Better get out of here before the cops come..."

The drive back to Trinidad was long as usual though occasionally interrupted by a parade of police cars and emergency response vehicles. By that time, my Starbucks cup of deliciousness was lukewarm and disappointing, and I wondered if that guy every calmed the hell down or got a slice of their pumpkin loaf to forget about it. I eyed the cup suspiciously.

"It's your fault, Starbucks. You and your damn addicting coffee."

I switched on the news as soon as I entered my humble abode just outside of downtown Trinidad. My Safeway purchases littered my living room: water, medicine, food, clothes, flashlight, batteries, and other survival supplies. I even stocked up on gas. I felt like my subconscious was trying to tell me something when it took a hold of my debit card and ran up a \$1500 bill on this crap.

"A virus has taken hold in Highland Park. We are urging residents to stay inside," the TV anchor announced with his perfectly coifed hair. "Do not answer the door, and do not let anyone bite you."

"Really?" I asked the TV dubiously.

"They're saying it's the zombie apocalypse, Tom," his co-anchor suggested. Tom looked grimly into the camera.

"That's what they're saying."

"Oh," I said. "That explains so much. I just thought it was a Thursday. I'm not really good with Thursdays."

So the zombie apocalypse started, and I witnessed it. I felt a flashing guilt run through my mind, but I squashed that pretty fast. Who

expects the guy behind you groaning and grumbling in the Starbucks line to be a zombie? A real zombie, anyway, should I call in sick tomorrow? Sorry Amy, can't come in to work today because there's a zombie apocalypse and I'd much rather be fired than be eaten by ravenous, feverish, man-eating creatures as much as they resemble you.

I ran to close my garage, my Jeep winking at me for saving it. Reinforcing windows, doors, and the garage actually wasn't all that hard. I stared at the Starbucks coffee once I'd gotten everything done. Was it actually Starbucks' fault? Did they cause some chemical switch in the brain to be flipped? I bet it was their pumpkin loaf. It's too addicting to be legal.

"Jessica, let me in," one of my neighbors pounded on the door. His voice was like nails on a chalkboard. Was he a zombie?

I peered through the peephole to see him clutching a bleeding arm, his eyes wide. "No can do, Joe. Survival of the fittest and whatnot. Plus you're bleeding on my welcome mat and looking like you're about to join the ranks of the unholy undead. That's just not nice."

"Come on, Carter," he begged. "I'm not going to bite you!"

"You said that at the last Halloween party."

I left him to his groveling at the door while I finished installing padlocks. Hands on my hips, I observed my handiwork. Take that, I Am Legend. Granted that was vampires, but still. I was proud of myself. I went back into the living room to relax and watch the scene unfold via television.

"Katie, did you call your family?" Tom asked his fellow anchor. She nodded grimly.

"So Tom, what are your plans for getting out of here?"

"I plan on shooting myself once this camera gets out of my face, Katie."

"Save a bullet for me," she said morosely. "We're not getting out of the studio alive."

"That is most unfortunate," I frowned at the two representations on my screen. "You guys should have called in sick this evening."

It was beginning to get dark outside, and I never knew this from the movies or books I read, but zombies howl. I left a few raw steaks around the neighborhood for the bears. Bears vs. Zombies, part one. I glanced back at the television just in time to see a bleeding creature land in poor Tom's lap, biting him on the clavicle. My mouth twisted into a grimace while his twisted into an expression of absolute terror. He looked at Katie dismally.

"I'm not going down alone, Katie," he said as he bit her on the shoulder. Katie just sighed and slumped back into her chair.

"I think now would be a good time to use that gun, Tom," she suggested.

The sound of the gunfire made me jump, and their deed was done. I switched off the TV, not wanting to stare at it any longer.

I tapped my fingers on the kitchen table and wondered how long it would be before I had to break out a generator. Plugging in my mp3 player to my stereo, I turned the volume up loud enough to constitute a college party. Surviving day one of a zombie apocalypse meant I needed a drink. As I drank my mojito, I wondered how long it would take for me to run out of alcohol to ease the stress of my new life. Ew, or how long it would take for me to get deep worry lines.

"Shit!" I exclaimed suddenly, my heart pounding painfully in my chest.

If there was a zombie apocalypse, how would I get my Starbucks fix?



The Cool
Dominique McLemore

Icarus

Kristen Hadley

1st Place

They always want to know why you did it. At first, they'll blame it on undiagnosed clinical depression—they'll call you crazy, but in medical terms, so that it sounds okay. They'll call it schizophrenia or mania or insomnia or hypersomnia or some combination of them all. They say there was something broken inside you, like one day, you just snapped and decided that the New York skyline and the concrete eighty stories down was the only answer.

They never consider that maybe you just wanted to fly. It's all about the cyclothymia and anhedonia and dysthymia, things you should have taken meds for, but didn't, because you didn't want to be a pill-popping zombie—you wanted to ache and rejoice and feel, goddamn it! You wanted to hurt just like everyone else.

For a moment, surrounded by streetlights and skyscrapers, you were wild and without fear, and free. It felt like you were soaring; the wind was in your red hair and your red dress and it whipped off your red shoes, and you were suspended in the air for a split-second, a human fireball, a circus trick.

They always want to say it was your troubled past. They search for abuse and rape and poverty, like those were what would have sealed the deal for you. But you weren't troubled—you were happy, mostly, with a nice job at a publishing company, and a nice apartment in Nolita, and a nice boyfriend who loved you and took you out to dinner and kissed you until your coral pink lipstick rubbed off onto his own chapped lips. Things were nice, mostly, or at least that was what you told yourself when you scrubbed your makeup off in front of the mirror at night. Everything was nice and you were happy.

You had so much to live for, they say.

And maybe they're right. You did have a lot to live for. Your coworkers talk about you when they're feeding quarters into the snack machine. They talk about your empty desk and how your phone still rings and the pair of black flats you left in your bottom right drawer for when the elevator was broken. They talk. And they miss you, or something—it isn't like they knew you, the real you, who listened to bad 80s power-rock ballads and read Marquez religiously. They knew a bit of you, with manicured fingernails and that nice boy you brought to the company Christmas party for the past three years.

That nice boy misses the taste of your lipstick and the scent of lilac that hung in your hair, which was soft and crimson. He misses your fingertips, torn with papercuts, and your nails gnawed down to the quick. He misses your nervous habits and the sounds you made when you slept and the press of your body against his, still, warm, there. He has called your cell phone, which was smashed when you fell, three times in the past week, just so he can hear your voice telling him to leave a message, and last night, he found a long strand of red hair on the pillow next to his. He keeps the photo of you two at the Smithsonian on the dresser—you're smiling in that one. You look like you love him.

On the day you left, he whispered that he loved you while you slipped your red kitten heels onto your feet. You didn't respond, but you hadn't responded for years. He made an effort to touch you, to help you zip the back of your dress, to kiss you gently and tell you goodbye. You nodded and you smiled halfway, and then you were gone.

But you'd been gone for a long time before that, and when you stepped up onto the ledge on the roof of your building, eighty stories didn't feel like such a long fall.

You weren't happy and you hadn't been happy for a while. You were content, maybe, or satisfied with your life, but things were different. You were hungry for something that New York was supposed to have filled in you—they always talk about New York like it can solve any problem, like it makes you feel alive and you have no problems, because New York is the best goddamn city in the whole world.

Or at least that's what they say.

In college, you had loved the view from your fifth-floor dorm room, where you could watch the girls on the quad in miniskirts and tights kiss their blond-haired, lacrosse-playing boyfriends. You liked to open the window and hear the sounds—music from the boy underneath the elm tree with a guitar, horns honking, the laughter of packs of sorority girls. You had fallen in love with that view and the boy with the guitar, and he came to New York with you and got a job waiting tables while you tried to work your way up into the publishing industry. He worked hard for you until you found a low-level internship and then you worked hard, too, and you came home to your shabby apartment in Little Italy and he braided your hair so it would be wavy the next morning. And back then, that felt like what you had imagined life was supposed to feel like. The money was tight, but you were happy and scared and more alive than you'd ever felt.

But over the years, that shabby apartment in Little Italy turned into a mediocre apartment in the Bowery, and that mediocre apartment in the Bowery turned into a nice apartment in Nolita, and money wasn't tight anymore, and he stopped braiding your hair and he found a real job

managing a music store. People said you two were happy, that you had it made and you were well on your way to the top of the publishing industry.

It just got boring. There's something exhilarating about living paycheck to paycheck, you thought, and knowing that there's going to be food on the table and electricity is boring. Boring. You started to feel caged, trapped in high heels and lipstick and Nolita.

The day you left, you climbed twenty-two flights of stairs in your red high heels until you finally reached the top of your building. It was windy, and the city below sounded like music. You reapplied your coral pink lipstick, left your bag next to the ledge, which you climbed up onto without any fear. Standing, you thought you could see the whole city—your apartment, the music store, the Greek restaurant where you refused his proposal.

With open eyes, you took a step forward, and you could swear you felt your wax wings flutter.

American Happenstance

Timothy Callais

Happenstance is defined as “a chance occurrence”. It’s when something that seems like it could have been planned happens accidentally. In most cases, the result couldn’t have been planned better, and probably wouldn’t happen again if you tried it twice. It could be winning the lottery, arriving at the supermarket just in time to get the closest parking spot, or just simply being in the right place at the right time. Happenstance can come in many forms, shapes, sizes, colors, places, and times. It can affect any person, place or thing, and its unique charm derives from the fact that you don’t know where, when, or how it’s going to show its face next.

The folks of Lafourche Parish, down in Bel Amie, Louisiana, didn’t see much “happenstance” back in the 1930’s. In fact, luck was somewhat a myth in those days. The people of Bel Amie were very simple people, primarily immigrants. Most of the families came from France, but occasionally you’d meet a Sicilian down the bayou. Despite their newfound country being in the dead of the Great Depression, life was pretty good. The economy didn’t affect them much. Families ate from the garden in the back yard, or the chickens Mama was raising in the coop, or the shrimp and crabs Poppa caught with his trawl-boat. The spirit of togetherness energized the community day after day. Contentment was a popular look on your neighbor’s face.

It was certainly on the face of Forrest Anselmi and his family. He and his wife Ada ran a large cow farm right in the heart of Bel Amie. Forrest was a short, fat, Sicilian man who was missing hair in all the right places, and sprouting it in all the wrong. Ada was very tall, blonde, and naturally beautiful. To everyone else, they seemed like the oddest couple in the world, but to them, they were a perfect match. They lived in a quaint, rather nondescript old farmhouse that sat at the head of the property, overlooking the beautiful bayou that cut through the center of the town. Things were simple and perfect. Forrest had his farm, his beautiful wife, and the sweetest daughter a man could ever ask for, Lillian.

From a very young age Lillian Anselmi always thought she was different; different from her folks; from her friends; from the entire town. She was always singing in public, or dancing in public, or pretty much doing whatever she could do to get the public’s attention. “Try to blend in more,” her father would tell her. But Lillian couldn’t blend in. She felt like a butterfly trying to blend in to a community of moths. Day after day she

found herself dreaming whilst still awake, dreaming of a better life, of a more fulfilling life, of a life at all. "There's got to be something more!," she thought to herself over and over again. She wanted to experience the world, and know things, and see things, and feel things.

"There's got to be something more than waking up with the sun every morning to feed the cows, tend to the garden, and clean the house. All I want is a life of excitement! Is that too much to ask?"

But Lillian never really did ask. She respected her parents far too much to question them, and after all, no one had ever left Bel Amie; so it stood to reason that no one would ever leave Bel Amie. So for twenty-two years, Lillian woke up with the sun every morning to feed the cows, help Ada in the garden, cook a meal for her family, and clean the house. Life was pretty dull, and eventually Lillian grew out of that overwhelming desire to be somebody; until one summer day in 1947. This day was particularly hot, so Forrest sent Lillian down the bayou to Old Man Callais's house to pick up a block of ice to keep the produce fresh.

"Hello, Mr. Callais."

"Mais, Lillian Anselmi. Che lawd! You done grown up a lot dare. You a beaut-tee-ful young lady, che."

"Oh, Mr. Callais, you say that every time I come in here."

"Mais yeah, and it's true every toim."

"You're a crazy old man, and I love you for it. Now, Poppa needs one block, please."

"Mais, he's gonna make you carry dat all duh way home? No, I don't tink so. I'm gonna get your ice and walk you home, che."

So, Mr. Callais winked and went to the back of his house to get a block of ice to carry home for her. While waiting in the front, Lillian noticed a flyer sitting on the coffee table. Lafourche Parish was announcing the opening of the Francis T. Nicholls Junior College up in Thibodaux, the Parish's capital. In less than two years, you learn to work in an office, and maybe even own your own business. Lillian folded the flyer, and stuck it in her pocket. She'd been taught stealing was bad, but somehow going home and not being able to stare at this flyer seemed worse to her. Her emotions started flowing. For many years she taught herself to suppress her desires to find a better life for herself, but now it was undeniably in her future.

Of course, Lillian convinced her father to allow her to attend the college in its opening year. At twenty-three years old, Lillian Anselmi finally started to feel like she had a future. The first couple of months were really difficult. Some days Lillian couldn't even get to school. A bus would come from Thibodaux to pick up all of the kids that needed a ride there, but some days, the bus just simply wouldn't come. And when she did make it to school, Lillian found it very hard to concentrate. There was so much around her; so many people wanting the same thing she wanted; yet something

was still missing.

At the library one day, trying to make heads or tails out of her math homework, a familiar young man sat at her table. There were plenty of other tables for him to sit at, empty tables, but he chose the one where Lillian was sitting.

"I'm terribly sorry if I'm bothering you. My name is Alfred Mayeur, I recognize you from my math class, and I notice you're doing the homework now. Would you mind if I joined you? I'm afraid Math is not my strong suit."

"Well, it's not mine either, but two heads are better than one. Maybe between us, we can come up with the right answers."

And she invited him to move closer. He smiled, and opened his book. Those two sat there for hours doing that math homework. They started figuring out numbers, but in the end, they were only thinking about chemistry. Lillian was adventurous and had a laugh that would carry across the entire library; Alfred was funny, and practical, and most importantly, from New Orleans. They'd never met anyone like each other.

They talked so long that Lillian missed the bus back to Bel Amie.

"Don't worry," said Alfred, "I've got a car."

"YOU HAVE A CAR?!" Lillian couldn't believe it. She'd never met anyone her age with a car before.

So, Alfred drove her home, and they talked and talked some more. Once they arrived, Alfred pulled into the driveway, looked at Lillian and said, "Hey. I've got a friend playing at an amateur night up in New Orleans this weekend. Would you like to come with me?"

"Well, I've never been to New Orleans. I'm not sure if my Poppa will like that very much."

"You're old enough to make your own decisions. Come on, it'll be fun. And I will personally make sure that nothing happens to you."

Lillian couldn't resist that smile, and she kissed him, a kiss that would go down in history books. So, she told her father that the school was hosting a Catholic retreat over the weekend, and of course, she got her way. The following Saturday, she took the bus up to Thibodaux, where she met up with Alfred, and rode in his car to New Orleans.

Lillian and Alfred had a great time at the jazz club. Lillian was finally feeling alive. Perhaps, that's because she was trying alcohol for the first time, but Alfred kept his promise, and never took his eyes off of her. Halfway through the night, Lillian got brave, and decided to enter herself into the open mic night. She sang a popular jazz standard of the day, and brought the house down. This is what she'd been missing: a crowd of people that wanted nothing else but to hear her sing and perform. She was in heaven.

Towards the end of the night, a man in a pinstriped suit approached Lillian. "I heard you sing," he said, "and I must say you've got some raw talent. I just started an agency in New York City, and I'm down here scouting the local talent. How would you like to be famous, kid?" Needless to say, Lillian was speechless, and still a little drunk. They exchanged contact information, and she promised she would think about it.

And she did think about it; a lot. In fact, it was all she could think about once she got back home. It was affecting her housework, and her parents started to notice something changing about her. One evening, over dinner, Lillian was daydreaming as she'd never before.

"Poppa, have you ever wanted to be famous?"

"Famous? I am famous! Everyone in town knows who I am."

"I know, Poppa, but I mean really famous. Like, all over the country."

"What are you getting at, Lilly?"

"Poppa, I have a confession to make. I didn't go on a Catholic retreat last weekend. I met a boy at school, and he invited me to a jazz club in New Orleans."

"Excuse me?"

"I know you're mad, but you wouldn't have let me go if I would have told you. And I'm telling you now because something happened."

"Oh?"

"I sang, and a talent scout heard me, and offered me a career in New York City, Poppa. New York City! Can you believe it?!"

But Forrest couldn't believe it. He wouldn't. They argued about it for hours. Ada tried to interject at times, but it was no use.

"Poppa, please! This is what I've been waiting for my entire life! Don't make me say no."

"You'll say no, and that's final."

"That's not fair. I want to make a better life for myself, Poppa."

"There is no better life, Lillian. There's no such thing as a dream coming true. If you do this, I no longer have a daughter."

Who can say what causes someone to reach their breaking point? That night, while Forrest and Ada were sleeping, Lillian packed her bags and caught a ride to the New Orleans airport, where the talent scout was waiting with her ticket. She didn't say goodbye to her folks, and she didn't say goodbye to Alfred. Lillian decided to take control of her own life, and for once, someone was going to make it out of Bel Amie.

The years passed; Lillian began making quite a name for herself in New York City, but she never stopped thinking about what she left behind. Her life was so busy now that she didn't have time for the simple joys, and after years in the business, she never met a man that she was willing to

settle down with. Life was pretty good but there was still something missing.

In 1970, over 20 years after she'd left Bel Amie, Lillian returned to her New York apartment from the biggest audition of her life. She'd had a successful career up until then, but finally, this was the part that would make her famous. This was the part of all parts, and if she got it, her life would feel worthwhile. However, when she checked the mail, in it was a telegram from back home. Forrest and Ada had both died of carbon monoxide poisoning a couple of weeks ago. Forrest had apparently installed a new space heater that had some faulty wiring. Lillian was beside herself. She hadn't spoken to her parents since the night she left for New York City, and now she had to go back down there to settle their wills.

It was very surreal for her being back in Bel Amie. Everything had changed, yet nothing was different. Her parents had kept her room the exact way she'd left it, only now on the walls were newspaper clippings of everything Lillian had ever done. For hours she sat on her parents' bed, crying, regretting, and hating herself for abandoning them all those years ago. So she decided stay for a while to remodel the house, and sell it. After all, she couldn't have a successful career in New York City and live on a cow farm in Bel Amie, Louisiana.

Lillian hired a contractor to come and take a look at the foundation of the house. And when he came to the front door, she couldn't believe her eyes.

"Alfred?"

"Hello, Lillian. I'd hoped it was you."

"You...you're a contractor in Bel Amie?"

"After Hurricane Betsy, Folks down here needed someone they could trust. How are you, Lillian?"

"I'm ...well... I don't know. Please come in."

Alfred came into the house. They talked for hours. He explained how he and Forrest had become quite close, and that he'd in fact, done some repairs on the house after Betsy, so he was pretty familiar with the foundation. Alfred asked about Lillian's career, and apologized that he'd never really gotten the chance to go and see her work. Once they started talking, it was almost like she'd never left. And neither one of them had ever found anyone else.

"Would you like to have dinner with me tonight, Alfred? I know this seems strange, but I thought it might be nice to catch up."

Alfred, of course, accepted. They went to the local Cajun restaurant and talked the night away. Lillian suddenly began to realize what was missing in her life; it was someone to share it with. Why didn't she say goodbye? Did she make the right decisions? Lillian loved Alfred, and Alfred was in love with Lillian. How, after all these years?

"It's getting late, Lillian, I'd better get you home."

"Can I see you again tomorrow night?"

"Only if your eyes are still working by then."

"Oh you, still the funny one. How about dinner at my place? This Cajun girl might have moved to the big city, but she sure still knows how to cook a good country meal."

Alfred, of course, accepted. The next day, as Lillian was returning from the market, the phone rang. It was her agent.

"Hot damn, baby! You got it!! You got it!! This is it!! You actually landed the role! You start rehearsals in two days! Get your ass up here!!!"

But how was she going to explain things to Alfred? Of course he knew that she wasn't staying around long, but this time she couldn't just leave without saying goodbye. She cooked Alfred dinner, as promised, placed two candles on the table, and put on some 40's jazz music. Alfred showed up in a nice suit, and carried a bouquet of yellow flowers in his hand. Lillian searched the entire night for a way to tell Alfred that she was leaving in the morning. The night was so perfect; almost.

"Lillian, I know it's been over twenty years, but I've never stopped thinking about you."

"That's sweet, Alfred."

"And I know this is crazy, but I don't want to lose you again."

Alfred got down on one knee, and reached into his pocket.

"Lillian, will you...?"

"Stop. Alfred. Please. I can't."

"What?"

"I can't. I'm so sorry. I'm flying back to New York tomorrow morning. I got the part! My big break!"

"Well, I can come with you."

"I can't ask you to do that. You've never even been to New York City."

"Well neither had you before you moved there."

"Alfred..."

"Or you can come back here! When you're done."

"HA! And live a life of nothing special? No thank you."

Alfred didn't need any more. He pulled his hand out of his pocket; empty, and stood up very slowly. "It was lovely to see you again, Lillian. I wish you all the luck in the world."

"Oh, Alfred. That's not what I meant. Our lives are just so different now."

"I love you, Lillian Anselmi. You haven't changed a bit. Goodbye." Alfred walked to the door.

"I'll still pay you to work on the house, Alfred."

He looked back at her. "Thank you, Lillian." And he walked out the

door. She stood quiet and still as she listened to him get in his car, and drive away. As she gathered herself, she walked over to the stove, and in a sudden burst of anger pushed her mother's casserole dish, causing it to fall to the floor and shatter. She began to cry tears of shame, tears of regret, tears of a realization that her life was no more important now than when she left twenty years ago. Lillian left the next morning for New York City. She began rehearsing the show, and from an outside perspective, Lillian seemed to be living 'the dream'. But still, something was missing.

It was opening night, and the show was flawless. Lillian was now the queen of Broadway. She brought down the house with every number, made thousands laugh with every joke, and every one of them jumped to their feet during her curtain call. It's what she'd always wanted, but is it what she needed?

After getting out of makeup, Lillian left out the stage door, where she was met by handfuls of adoring young fans. Through the crowd she saw a timid older man, standing on the corner. As if the noise around her silenced, she slowly approached the man. It was Alfred, and in his hand was the playbill from her show.

"Alfred?"

"You were amazing, Lillian. I can't believe...congratulations."

"But how...?"

"I couldn't miss your big break. And plus, you were right. I've never been here before. You know it's bigger than it looks on TV." That made Lillian laugh.

"I can't believe you came. Wh...uh...what are you doing now? Do you want to get a drink?"

"Oh. No. I've got to be at the airport really early tomorrow. I actually didn't expect to see you. I mean...off the stage."

"Alfred, let me take you to..."

"Goodbye, Lillian. You've made it. Congratulations."

"Goodbye, Alfred."

They shared an awkward hug. Alfred tipped his hat, and walked off into the distance. That night Lillian couldn't sleep. All she could think about was Alfred. All she could think about was how she'd spent her entire life searching for herself, and a better life. Suddenly she realized that she had found herself long ago, and that she couldn't think of a better life than to spend it with Alfred. So, the next morning she decided to race to the airport to catch Alfred before he got on the plane. She took a cab, and of course, traffic was treacherous. As she ran up to the terminal, she suddenly realized that she had missed him. His airplane was taking its position on the runway. She'd lost him. Floods of emotions engulfed her being. She sat in a chair and buried her face in her hands, sat there for a minute or two, and then came a tap on her shoulder.

IT WAS ALFRED! He never got on the plane.

"But...but...you...the plane...how?"

"I suddenly realized that I didn't get a chance to see that Statue of Liberty," said Alfred with a wink.

"Oh, Alfred. I'm sorry. I love you. I love you. I love you. And I don't care about fame and fortune, I just want to spend the rest of my life with you."

"But what about your show?"

"My contract is only for another month. I told them that I will not be renewing it."

"But this is your big break. What about a life of nothing special?"

"When you walked away last night, I would have traded it all to have you turn back around. I realized that there IS something more than waking up with the sun every morning to feed the cows, and tend to the garden, and clean the house. There is so much more than being a star on Broadway and everybody knowing your name. It's you. I'm taking a chance. Is that too much to ask?"

"Lillian..."

"Now, wasn't there something you wanted to ask me?"

Monkey Wrench

Marcus Lee

A young monkey named Chip woke up in the middle of the day. He crawled out from under the dry log he and his mother had nestled under for the night. He looked around the dusty area, but did not find his mother amongst the bare branches of the only tree around. Chip didn't see his mother by the watering hole, where the mother monkeys liked to gather. He didn't see any monkeys. He was alone.

The construction workers were called in early to fix a damaged cage at the zoo. The zookeepers had already taken all of the animals out of the cage, and it was up to the construction workers to fix the cage without disturbing any of the visitors. Of course, it was the middle of a school day, so not many customers were there; but a bus full of second graders on a field trip was on its way.

Don, one of the workers, said, "Man, this monkey cage stinks. I can barely concentrate on what I'm doing from inhaling these toxic fumes."

"I thought you said that you could do this in your sleep," responded Kyle, the other worker.

"I can!" Don began to work faster just to prove a point to Kyle, who was grinning in the background.

Chip noticed two men pulling on the barred fence. He saw a tiny opening that a small monkey like him could easily get through, but he had never been outside of the cage before. His mother told him that the outside world, while more exciting, is a very dangerous place, especially now that they are where the humans live. Chip wondered if that's where everybody else went. Did they escape through the hole? Chip didn't like being alone. He was the youngest monkey of the group, but he could be strong and brave enough to find the others.

"Here you go, young man," said an elderly lady as she handed Don a hammer.

"What are you doing?" asked Don as he put his hammer back into his tool belt, and eyed the old lady warily.

"He means thank you, ma'am," said Kyle as he smiled down at the short, hunched over lady.

"I thought I'd help," she said, "my husband was a construction worker."

"Well, thanks, but no thanks," cut out Don.

"Nonsense, I know what I'm doing," replied the elderly woman as she began looking through their toolbox, rummaging through everything.

Chip's attention was brought back to the humans at the fence when he heard clinking and clanging. A grey haired woman was digging through a box full of shiny things. Chip's eyes grew big. This had caught his full attention. 'Shiny human toys,' he thought.

"What do you think you are doing!?" Chip heard one of the bigger humans say. He crawled up the tree and onto the branch that extended closest to the hole in the fence.

"Aha!" the woman cried, "I found you some pliers." She flung her hands up in excitement and pride.

"Those aren't pliers, you old bat," growled Don, "that's a wrench." The elderly woman was about to respond when something hit her hand and made her whole arm feel heavier.

"Oh!" She saw a brown fur ball with eyes and a tail, grabbing at the pliers in her hand.

"Where'd that monkey come from?" asked Kyle.

"Don't let him take my wrench, old woman!" shouted Don.

Chip did just that. He took advantage of the elderly lady's shock, and took the wrench out of her hand. He bounced down onto the ground and took off running. The two bigger humans were chasing after him, so he ran faster and started to cry out for his mother. He managed to get away from the two humans, and started to look for any sign or sight of other monkeys, when he came across the biggest banana he had ever seen. He was walking up to it slowly, in awe, and ready to have the best meal of his life. The banana began to peel itself, which had Chip's big eyes growing even bigger. But then, a bunch of tiny humans began pouring out. Chip started hollering in confusion and disappointment.

"Look, Mrs. Hay, a monkey," one of the children cried out.

"Oh my goodness, it's loose!" said Mrs. Hay. "Get back on the bus, everyone!" The children weren't listening to her but instead began to approach the monkey.

Chip was mad now. The humans had destroyed the largest banana he had ever seen. He ran towards the kids and begun to swing the humans' toy at them. The children all screamed and ran back onto the bus with Mrs. Hay crying in the background about a monkey with a wrench.

The bus drove away, and little Chip's eyes felt watery. He was so hungry now, but he didn't have time to think about uneaten bananas. He was suddenly grabbed from behind and lifted up into the air. The toy was taken from his hands.

"Here you go," a man said as he handed Don the wrench.

"You zookeepers should have made sure that you got all of the monkeys out," Don grumbled.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Kyle.

"I'll just take him to where the others are," replied the zookeeper.

Chip was sad and scared. First the humans destroyed the best banana ever, and now a strange human had him. He was probably going to be eaten. Chip remembered one of his friends saying that some humans eat monkeys. Yep, he was going to be eaten. Chip closed his eyes and hoped it wouldn't hurt, when he started to hear other monkeys. He opened his eyes to see that on the other side of a door were his family and friends, and enough bananas to last them for three days. He wasn't going to be eaten! The strange human opened the cage door and placed Chip inside. He immediately ran over to his mother, who wrapped her warm hairy arms around him. She gave him a banana, and he began to tell her and his friends about the largest banana he ever seen, but no one would believe him. Chip didn't care, because he was no longer alone.

The Road

Johnathan Staton

I was born to a generation of Ronald Reagan, a generation of no heroes only of villains, of no virtue only suicide. Walking along a road of no name I come to a realization that the Man has become me, as much as I have allowed myself to conform to it. Cocaine highballs and hard truth of national deficits and gas shortages were my bedtime tales. Home abuse made so public it became hard to see why I should honor thy mother and father. Seeing Daddy sleep with little Timmy's mommy seemed to put a harsh glare on marriage.

Values of commercial standards are my mortal system and whether or not it was by my choice I have to accept this fate that has been handed to me by Baby Boomers who got high and then saw a horrible truth. The acid is all dry and just yesterday the magic died away as holidays became just another shopping day and when birthdays were just a day closer to dying. Too young for Vietnam, too old to understand why Santa Claus couldn't be real, I took to the road in my sixteenth year to find myself in a wasted land some fool deemed America.

I have no name, only a brand. I can only be different in the ways that others deemed acceptable. Teen pop is choking me to death as I put one foot in front of the other and take a dusty road less taken. Knapsack slung across broad shoulders, I can only just remember the day when my mother stopped being a hippie and started being an urban yuppie. The hair now so prim and proper, she begs me to take the interstate, but radar love is calling with a Golden Earring tune and I find myself following. My jeans are not Guess, nor Calvin Klein; instead they are woven from the fabric of true grit. My shirt is not the trend but only the plain Jane condemnation, my hair cut by my peers, and my soul trimmed by the Industry that once tried to clone me for profit. Left foot, right foot, in such a steady beat I am reminded of an art form called the blues that was driven by a fable of passion. A tune in my head drives me further because I've seen the rain on a sunny day, and although I never knew who stopped it, I kind of see where it began.

Political correctness so far away as I suddenly lost the part of my mind that cared who I offended or if I made some other's naked truth feel revealed. In my head I'm singing along with the music not computer generated, written by rebels who fought against something with no victory in sight. I passed by Woodstock and watched it burn. A generation so fucked up it can't see the fault line and a rage so pure and without a target it burned

us all away. Left foot, right foot, I've seen nothing as clear as I have today and the jagged little pill to swallow is because I want it to end. I've got the fire now, the burning to name myself something so different that I become that horrid thing we labeled outcast, but whispered of as unique.

To my left pulls up a muscle car, made of Detroit steel, my brother would have called it Cherry. Tinted windows and a rumble to match no other, the jet-black passenger door opened and offered a temptation I wasn't prepared to accept. I could hear the blues from inside, smooth steel sounds from guitars played by calloused hands. I lowered my sights and saw past the abyss to see a man not too old and not too young. He looked at me and whispered in a husky voice "I'm headin' down to New Orleans." The face so familiar, on the tip of my tongue, I almost tell him that New Orleans has been blown away, but seeing this truth might have killed the stranger.

"It's just not the same," I whispered in return, kicking the dust of time from my road weary boots. "Changes done gone and made everything different, for better or for worst, I can't tell."

"Change is never our choice, kid," he stated as I slid into a cool leather bucket seat. "Change's the destiny we dance to." The car lurched forward and I grabbed onto the door, slamming it shut and casting my last glimpse of ignorance away. I've never been to prison, did a few too many drugs, and I just want to be like this strange driver who shifts gears as we seem to shift time zones. Silence becomes me. A sense of peace that tells me I'm walking the line as that slow Texas jig comes over the radio.

"You like Johnny Cash, kid?" asked the driver whose name I could almost call out, but couldn't understand the definition to. "He tells a life of pain in a slow locomotive beat. Johnny Cash is Detroit steel and a cherry engine, just as much as Elvis Presley will live forever and Marilyn Monroe will always be beautiful."

I listen to his words and find some sort of honesty in his version of the truth. I looked ahead and saw a world go dark. No lights of Vegas here, just the pale red moon rising above ever changing dunes of sand. "Am I dying?" I ask as I think I'm on the road to hell.

"We're all dying kid," says the driver. "Just as much as the Boulevard of broken dreams is right here and now, the brick wall of an end is coming on so fast all we can do is fight to slow down. Chemicals under the skin, the fat sucked out of our thighs, it's an eating disorder world for those who want to live forever. But they'll never have what James Dean and Marlon Brando had, they'll never be legends because no one risks everything on an idea anymore."

The driver pulls out a wine bottle from France and flicks off the top with an expert twist of the thumb. He takes a long pull, and I can imagine the bittersweet taste of the juice running past chapped lips to a parched palate

of ideas and psychology. He doesn't offer any to share because our vices are our own to bare. The car's picking up speed and suddenly I want off because here in this ride there is more truth than any man wants to see.

"There are no wars to fight," he says after a delayed silence, "No crusades to hold on to anymore. Just buy this, sell your souls and be like everyone wants you to be like. I think the world died a little when Goth stopped being a movement and started being a trend. I think the angels cried the day John Lennon died. The day we all died and the magic makers just went away. The dreamers of the dreams have all gone and now there is nothing but what I made of it. It's our own beds to lie in, our own graves to fill."

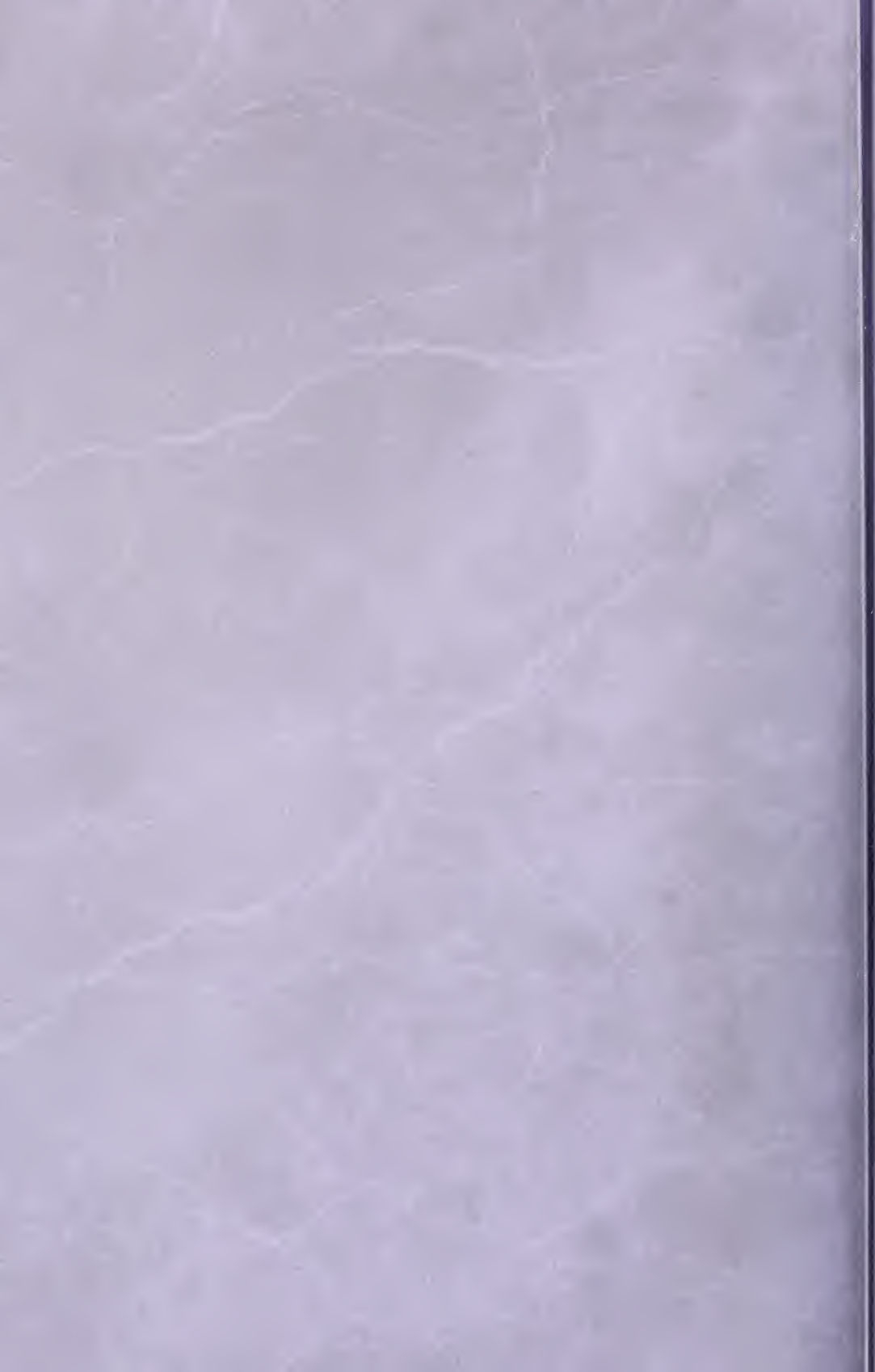
And just then I knew the man I was riding with was buried in France. They found him long ago with a needle in his arm and a bottle in his hand. For him the world changing too fast into something that betrayed what all legends fought for. I looked to the wavy brown hair and cool eyes of the ghost of Jim Morrison and tried not to cry. He was a defeated man, much like the old gods, and he was heading off to die, waste away in the Café of Dreams in the cold streets of Heartbreak. I wish I could have seen him in his prime, before the vises took him into their grip. I wish I could have seen them all before their faces ended up on T-shirts around the world. He pulls over and stops the car.

"Has New Orleans changed?" he asked with tears brimming in his eyes, "cause I'm afraid that's our refuge."

I wanted to tell him the truth. It's killing blow on the tip of my tongue, dancing on the razor's edge of reality, but instead I just shook my head and smiled. "It's the same as it always has been," a lie befitting a friend who's been dead so long, just never knew it.

"Then you get out here," he says as the door opens, allowing my escape, "cause I got a road or two to cross on my own and there's no coming back from that." I step out into cool night and take one last look at a hero my mother once told me about. He took another long pull from the jug. "But who knows, Kid, maybe you'll stop by one day and I can buy you a cup of coffee. We'll sit and jaw a while with Elvis, flirt and make eyes at Marilyn. Jimmy and Marlon will tell us tales and Humphrey Bogart will serve chow with Hunter S. Thompson and the Duke, and who knows, maybe John and George will show up too."

I look to this ghost and shed a tear of my own. I tell him I'd like that and wish him well as he heads on down the road. As the car's taillights just seem to fade away, I try to make sense of the ghost I had seen today. But sometimes it's best to take the old magic just how it's offered, in a Café of Dreams in the cold streets of Heartbreak.





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